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SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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A SHORT HISTORY

OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

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GEORGE SAINTSBURY

LATE PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

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PREFACE

THE object of this book, which was undertaken more than four years ago, is to give, from the literary point of view only, and from direct reading of the literature itself, as full, as well supplied, and as conveniently arranged a storehouse of facts as the writer could provide. The substitution of bird's-eye views and sweeping generalisations for positive knowledge has been very sedulously avoided; but it is hoped that the system of Interchapters will provide a sufficient chain of historical summary as to general points, such as, for instance, the nature and progress of English prosody and the periods of prose style. No part of the book has been delivered as lectures; and the sections of it concerning the Elizabethan period and the Nineteenth Century are not replicas of previous work on those subjects.

None but a charlatan will pretend that he has himself written, and none but a very unreasonable person will expect any one else to write, a history of the kind free from blunders. The sincerest thanks are owed to Mr. W. P. Ker, Fellow of All Souls and Quain Professor of English Literature in University College, London, and to Mr. G. Gregory Smith, Lecturer in English in the University of Edinburgh, for their great kindness in reading the proofs of the book, and for their most valuable suggestions. But the author is wholly responsible, not merely for all the errors

of fact that may have escaped their scrutiny, but for all the critical opinions put forward in the volume. Nor has his object been to make these opinions prominent, but rather to supply something approaching that solid platform, or at least framework, of critical learning without which all critical opinion is worthless, and upon which such opinion can be more easily built or hung afterwards. Reading of the books themselves is the only justification precedent in such a case on the part of the writer; and his only object should be to provoke and facilitate reading of the books themselves on the part of his readers.[1]

EDINBURGH, 29*th July* 1898.

[1] *Note to Eighth Edition.*—In all the preceding reprints of this book the text has been read through, oversights corrected, and small additions made, the latter with especial reference to new works or editions. This process has been repeated with great care in the present issue. I had at one time thought of endeavouring, by means of an Appendix, or of end-notes to the chapters of the last Book, to include the most distinguished men of letters who have died since the beginning of the twentieth century, as I have actually done in my *Nineteenth Century Literature*. But such additions would themselves have been of necessity incomplete; they would have had a patchy and ill-composed appearance; and I think all experts will agree that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to write them in a key exactly corresponding to that of a survey originally made as it were "horizontally"—at any rate consecutively and at once—of the literature of some fifteen centuries past. I have therefore confined myself to additions and corrections in the original text. Those who want more will find it, very fully in some cases, in the book above named, and in my Histories of *Prosody* and of *Prose Rhythm*. G. S.

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THE PRELIMINARIES OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE EARLIEST ANGLO-SAXON POETRY

Widsith—Beowulf—Waldhere and the *Fight at Finnsburg—Deor*

THE oldest document which has a possibly authentic claim to be English Literature,[1] if but English Literature in the making and far off completion, is the poem commonly called *Widsith*, from its opening word, which some take to be a proper name.[2] Others simply see in it the designation of a "far-travelled" singer, who here recounts his journeyings in 143 lines of no great literary beauty, and only interesting as sketching the gainful and varied life of a minstrel in the Dark Ages, were it not for the proper names which

Widsith.

[1] Fuller English treatments of this matter will be found in Mr. Stopford Brooke's *History of Early English Literature;* in Mr. H. Morley's *English Writers*, vols. i. and ii.; in Professor Earle's *Anglo-Saxon Literature;* and in the translation of Ten Brink's *English Literature*, vol. i. The texts discussed in this chapter form the first five numbers of Grein-Wül(c)ker's *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, vol. i. pp. 1-277, which gives two texts of *Beowulf*. This latter has been frequently edited and translated; Professor Earle's *Deeds of Beowulf* is a good translation without text.

[2] Some high authorities, looking upon *Widsith* as a "made-up" thing, hold it to be later, and would assign the priority to the *Finnsburg* fragment or others. No opinion one way or the other is expressed here; indeed, the writer holds that the evidence is insufficient for adopting any. But it may be convenient to make the point an occasion *in limine* for a respectful request to readers not to take absence of mention of theories of this kind, or statements in the text apparently antagonistic to them, as proof of ignorance on the writer's part. This book attempts to be a history, not of the latest or any opinions about literature, but of that literature itself. The practically endless questions of authenticity, integrity, date, and so forth, must be, as a rule, left to special study.

bestrew the piece. Not a few of these occur, or seem to occur, in other early verse, and have the interest of the "parallel passage." But three are, or seem to be, those of persons well known to history—Eormanric or Hermanric,[1] King of the Goths; Ætla or Attila, the Scourge of God and the King of the Huns; and, lastly, a certain Ælfwine, whom some think identical with Alboin or Albovine, King of the Lombards, the husband, the insulter, and the victim of Rosmunda. It is, of course, obvious at once that though it is not impossible for the same man to have been contemporary with Hermanric, who died in 375, and Attila, who died in 453, no contemporary of either could have seen the days of Alboin, who felt his wife's revenge in 572. Therefore either Ælfwine must be somebody else or the poem is doubtful. Into such discussions this book will never enter, unless there is the strongest reason of a purely literary character for them, and there is none such here. It is sufficient to say that *if* Eormanric is the Hermanric known to history, and *if* "Widsith" saw his day, this document dates within the confines of the fourth century, at a time when no other modern language can show proofs of having had even a rudimentary existence.

The MS., the famous Exeter Book[2] of *gehwilcum þingum* ("things of sorts"), which Bishop Leofric gave to his Cathedral some 700 years later than Hermanric's day, and which still remains there, could, of course, not be expected to give us the original form of the "word-hoard," of which in his first line[3] the Far-Traveller declares the unlocking. Yet it shows us a language very remote indeed from English in appearance (though this same word "word-hoard," which appears with the omission of a single letter, shows the remoteness to be more apparent than real), but also different from Continental Old-Saxon, and from Icelandic, its nearest relations, neighbours, and contemporaries. This language—a point more important to literature—is arranged, or can be arranged, in lines of not strictly regular length, and obeying no law of rhythm that apparently resembles those of any modern or classical prosody, except that there is a sort of far-off echo of trochaic cadence, and that the lines approach the ordinary octosyllable or dimeter more than any other form. There is no rhyme, for though it is by no means uncommon for two or more adjacent lines to end in the same syllable, this syllable is one on which the voice would lay no stress. Neither is there assonance or vowel-rhyme, the preliminary

[1] See Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, chap. xxvi.

[2] Ed. Thorpe (London, 1842); in course of re-editing for the Early English Text Society by I. Gollancz (vol. i. London, 1895), in both cases with translations. Its contents will be noted later.

[3] *Widsith matholade: word-hord onleac* = "Widsith spoke, (he) unlocked (his) word-hoard."

to rhyme itself in most of the Romance tongues. But there is a very curious, though, in *Widsith*, elusive and irregular, system of *alliteration*, by which certain words, often, though far from always, two in the earlier half of the line and one in the later, begin either with the same consonant or with a vowel. And it is further usually arranged that the stress, accent, length, or whatever word be preferred, shall fall on these alliterated syllables whether it falls on others or not.[1] As for the purely literary characteristics, the nature of the piece, which, as has been said, is little more than a catalogue of names, gives very small scope. Imaginative critics have, however, discovered in it that specially English delight in roving which has distinguished many of our race—as well as, for instance, such hardly English persons as Ulysses and Sindbad.

There are names in *Widsith*—Heorot, Hrothgar, and others—which connect the poem, so far as they go, with one of much greater extent, interest, and merit, though, if the furthest age which each can reasonably claim be assigned, decidedly younger. This is the famous *Beowulf*, according to some the first on the beadroll of substantive and noteworthy poems in English, using that word in the most elastic sense, and according to all who have given themselves the trouble (now minimised by scholarly assistance, if the help of the scholars be taken and their snares resisted) to acquaint themselves with it, a saga of undoubted age, originality, and interest. Adopting the same system which we adopted in the case of *Widsith*, that of selecting the earliest dated name that can be reasonably identified with one mentioned in the poem, *Beowulf*, so far as subject goes, would be as old as the second decade of the sixth century, 520 or a little earlier, when a certain fairly historical Chochilaicus raided the Frisian coast, according to Gregory of Tours. This Chochilaicus is plausibly conjectured to be the Hygelac of the poem. But beyond this it will not be safe to go, for scholarly conjecture, or perhaps it were better to say conjectural scholarship, has for the better part of a century let itself loose over the date, scene, meaning, and composition of the piece. Whether it was brought from Jutland by the Saxon invaders and Anglicised or was composed in England itself; whether the scenery is that of the east or the west coasts of the North Sea; whether it is an entire poem or a congeries of ballads; whether it is a literal history embellished poetically, a deliberate romance, or a

Beowulf.

[1] This account of prosody is based in the first place on *Widsith*, and is not intended as controversial against those who, with Dr. Sievers, insist on the exact character of the Anglo-Saxon scheme such as it was. It acquired, no doubt, a good deal of such exactness in time; though any one who will reflect on the consequences of the fact that the texts exist almost invariably in single MSS., will be slow to accept any but wide conclusions.

myth—all these questions have been asked with the pains, answered with the confidence, and the answers all poohpoohed with the disdain usual, if not invariable, in such cases. We shall only say here that the date, admittedly uncertain, is somewhat unimportant; that the question "History, fiction, or myth?" is not of the kind here dealt with; and that while some have been hardy enough to pronounce with confidence that the scenery must be Northumbrian and no other,[1] the present writer would undertake to find twenty coast districts in England, and feels certain that there are twenty times twenty and more also out of it, which would perfectly fit.

To the student of literature who can be content to pretermit the unnecessary, *Beowulf* presents itself in a manner which may be summarised as follows:—It is a poem, in rather less than 3200 lines, which must of necessity be very old, and which, for reasons to be mentioned presently, is in its original form very likely as old as, or older than, all but the first invasion of Britain by the Saxons. The history of its unique MS.,[2] though too long to be given in detail here, adds to its interest. This is part of one (Vitellius A. xv.) of those famous treasures of Sir Robert Cotton's which form almost the most precious part of the British Museum Library, and one of those which were only saved so as by fire in 1731. It is not known where it came from, and though it was catalogued by Humphrey Wanley a quarter of a century before the fire, he unfortunately mistook its subject, and the interest which then still prevailed as to Anglo-Saxon literature (though it afterwards waned for the greater part of the century) was not immediately directed to it. Its supposed connection with Denmark, in Wanley's description, attracted the learned Icelander Thorkelin to it, and, after vicissitudes, his version appeared in 1815, since which it has been constantly re-edited and translated. Meanwhile the MS. had been going from worse to worse ever since the fire, and the superstructure of commentatorial editing has been constantly adding more and more superfluous matter. One of the few, if not facts, yet opinions which seem worth holding fast, is that in its present form the MS. is probably not older than the tenth century, and that the poem had by that time undergone divers changes in shape and dialect. Another fact of the first literary value is that the chief incidents of its first part reproduce themselves in the most curious way in one of the five great Icelandic sagas, that of *Grettir the Strong*.[3]

[1] For is there not a Bowlby Cliff close to Staithes in Yorkshire? and is it not the tallest on the English and Scottish mainland? and does not Bowlby = Bowwowlby = Beowulfby? and did not Cædmon live at Whitby, a few miles off? Indeed, for a commentatorial sorites the logic is rather unusually perfect.

[2] Which also contains *Judith*; *see* next chapter.

[3] Englished by Morris and Magnusson, London, 1869.

As for its subject, there is, as is very usual in poems of its class, a sort of genealogical prologue wherein there is a confusion of Beowulfs. The proper action does not begin for a hundred lines or so, when we hear of the happiness of Hrothgar, a king whose court is at Heorot, and its marring by a monster named Grendel who enters the hall by night and slaughters the thanes. This continues for twelve years, till Beowulf, our Beowulf, a thane of King Hygelac's, who dwells over the sea, hears of the nuisance and determines to end it. He journeys towards Heorot, and, after some demurs by the coastguard thereof, arrives and is hospitably received by Hrothgar and his queen, though there is some jealousy among the nobility. The adventure is committed to Beowulf, and Grendel does not fail to come at night. Indeed, he has seized one warrior before Beowulf grips him. Then begins the first and not one of the worst of the fights of English poetry—which has good fights. The monster is not vulnerable by steel, so that Beowulf's men cannot help him; but the chief tears off the fiend's arm, shoulder and all, and he flies to die in the mere where his den is, making it boil with his blood. There is much triumph, feasting, singing, gift-giving, and the like.

But after all Something renews the attacks on Heorot, and an etheling of high blood is carried off. Beowulf is not in the hall, having been guested elsewhere, but he soon hears from the King that his adventure is not done, and determines to finish it in the mere itself. He dives fearlessly in, and on reaching the bottom is caught by a water-hag, Grendel's mother, who has killed the etheling. The fight is fiercer than that with her son; the hero's earthly weapons are useless against the hag, and he is actually beaten by her in wrestling and for a moment at her mercy. But his byrnie (mail-shirt) is better as a defence than his sword in offence, and hard by him, on the cave floor where the fight takes place, he sees a mighty falchion within reach. He gains it, draws it, and cuts the hag's head off, doing the same afterwards to the dead body of Grendel, which he finds near by; but the blood of the fiends is so venomous that the sword itself, though it had strength to slay, melts in the poison.

Meanwhile Beowulf's men above on the bank have given him up for lost, and Hrothgar's men have gone away. But his own comrades remain, welcome him as he swims up triumphantly with Grendel's head, and escort him in triumph to court with the head and the hilt of the sword. The most interesting part of the poem is over, but only just half its length is exhausted. Proper ceremonies at Heorot follow, and a long report of Beowulf to Hygelac. This king falls in battle (perhaps, as said above, historically), and Beowulf succeeds him, to be plagued in his turn not by a water fiend, but by a

land dragon, whose hoard has been rifled, and who in revenge lays waste the country, burning all houses, even the palace, with his fiery breath. Beowulf determines to meet him single-handed and does so, all his men but one flying in terror. He slays the dragon, but is mortally injured by the teeth and fire-jets of the enemy. The poem finishes with laments, condemnation of the cowardly fliers, and the rummaging of the dragon's hoard.

The vehicle of it is a line of the same kind (with minor variations) as that described under *Widsith*, but the different nature of the subject (and, no doubt, also the greater genius of the author, and the wider scope afforded) raises it much above that composition as poetry. As is the case with all the pieces in this section, it has been rather wildly and unreservedly praised, and has been made to bear all sorts of meanings and messages which the unilluminated may fail to discover. But it is a good verse-saga, spirited in incident, not destitute of character, and showing, though an early and rudimentary, yet a by no means clumsy or puerile system of poetic phrase, composition, and thought. The fights are good fights; Beowulf, though, as we should expect, something of a boaster, is a gentleman and a tall man of his hands. Hunferth, Hrothgar's jealous courtier and "orator," is, after his fashion, a gentleman too—it is he who lends Beowulf a sword for the second encounter; the appearance of Hrothgar's queen is gracious; the pictures of the sea and the mere (its waters overshrouded by trees with writhen roots), and the spear-stalks in the hall, ash-staved and grey-steel-tipped, are not to be despised.

This is the verdict of the strictest criticism of intrinsic merit, putting the historic estimate aside altogether. And if, as we are surely entitled to do in a history, we do *not* put the historic estimate aside,—if we take into consideration the fact, which is all but a certain fact, that *Beowulf* is the very oldest poem of any size and scope in any modern language, that it has no known predecessors,[1] and has the whole literature of romance for successors,—then without attributing to it merits which it cannot claim, or muddling it up with myths which simply minish its interest, we shall see that it is a very venerable document indeed, well worth the envy of the nations to whom it does not belong. Even if it were no older than its MS., *Beowulf* would be the senior of the *Chanson de Roland* by nearly a century, the senior of the *Poema del Cid* by two, the senior of the *Nibelungen Lied* by two or three. In reality it is possibly the elder of the eldest of these by half a millennium. Some of those who love

[1] There are, of course, those who say that it had many. But if so, these many "have the defect of being lost," and perhaps it may be said also that of not being known ever to have existed. The text speaks only of known and existing work of epical form.

England least have been fain to admit that we have the best poetry in Europe: it is thanks mainly to *Beowulf* that our poetry can claim the oldest lineage and poetical coat-armour from the very first.

The other remains which certainly or probably belong to the same class chronologically with *Widsith* and *Beowulf* are of much shorter length, and, with one exception, of less interest. The fragment (about sixty lines) called *Waldhere* ("Walter") would seem to belong to an old, if not oldest, edition, so to speak, of that cycle of Burgundian sagas of which the *Nibelungen Lied* presents us with a later handling, though this particular fragment has nothing to do with that poem. So, too, the *Fight at Finnsburg* (fifty lines), another fragment, has for its main, if not its sole, English interest, besides the language, the fact that the subject is mentioned in *Beowulf* as the theme of song, though, of course, not necessarily of *this* song. But the third, the fifth of the whole group as usually arranged, has greater attractions. This is the so-called *Complaint of Deor*, which in the first place is, though a short, a complete piece; in the second, has not merely unity as a composition, but individual spirit and interest as a poem; and in the third, shows us an immense advance in poetical form. Deor is a minstrel who has fallen out of favour with his lord, his supplanter being a certain Heorrenda, skilled in song. The fifty-two verses of the poem are individually like those already noticed, but they are arranged in a different fashion, being divided into stanzas of irregular length by a refrain—

Waldhere and the *Fight at Finnsburg.*

Deor.

> Thæs ofereode: thisses swa mæg.
> That was got over: so may this be.

The instances which he alleges to confirm himself in his *hoc olim meminisse juvabit*, the trials of Wayland the great smith, the betrayal of Beadohild, with other woes of Geat, of Theodoric, of Hermanric, have some attraction of curiosity, and the general tone of pluck facing luck is manly and interesting. But the advance in form is the real charm of the poem. If *Deor* is really very old, its author had attained, though only in a rough and rudimentary fashion, to some of those secrets of lyrical poetry which were as a rule hidden from Anglo-Saxon bards even of a much later day. He had grasped the *stanza*, the great machine for impressing form upon the almost formless void;[1] and he had grasped the *refrain*, which is not only a mighty set-off to poetry in itself, but has the inestimable property of naturally suggesting rhyme, the greatest and most precious of all poetical accidents. When the ear has once caught the charm of

[1] There is a theory that the stanza came first; but here again all the other examples are lost, and none are known to have existed.

repeated sound in this way, the brain almost inevitably suggests the multiplication of it without damage to sense, by repeating not the whole line, but part of the line only. We have not in *Deor* reached really exquisite poetry, but we are safely on the way towards it. We have the passionate interpretation of things felt and seen; we have the couching of that interpretation in rhythmical utterances subjected to and equipped with arrangements and ornaments beyond those of the mere integral line; and we have the confinement of the utterance within a reasonable length. When you have these things in poetry, you have not yet everything, but you are on the way to have it.

The reserved point, in reference to this batch of poems, which has been more than once mentioned above is this: that in no one of them is there the slightest evidence, apart from their existence in more or less antique forms of Anglo-Saxon, of any connection with England. The supposed indications of scenery are, as has been said above, and must be very seriously repeated, the shadow of a shade, the dream of a dream; no one who has had any share of training in the appreciation of evidence will attach the slightest importance to them. There are passages in *Widsith*, in *Beowulf*, in *Deor* which seem to argue a knowledge of Christianity; but all of these may be interpolations, and none of them is decisive to a balanced judgment. And such historical or quasi-historical references (the more important noted above) as we do find seem to carry us back to periods about the fourth and fifth centuries; while there is nothing in any of them, except the quite indecisive Alboin identification, which suggests a date later than 520, and nothing, even this, that goes later than 600.

Therefore it has seemed to no bad wits not impossible, or even improbable, that this group may represent the documents, certainly not "fifty volumes long," or at least the traditions, which the Anglo-Saxon-Jutes carried with them as "cabin-furniture" in their invasion of the Greater England, and may actually be the workings up of such documents, or at least such traditions, not so very much later. We cannot prove this, and we should very carefully abstain from the large generalisations from supposed characteristics in these poems which have sometimes been made as to the English spirit. Indeed, we should rather say that ascertained or imagined characteristics of the English spirit are in these exercitations carried back to the poems, and discovered there after having been carried. But we cannot disprove either the antiquity or the relationship, and it would be a great pity if we could.

CHAPTER II

CÆDMON, CYNEWULF, AND THOSE ABOUT THEM

Anglo-Saxon poetry mostly sacred — MSS. — Cædmon and Cynewulf — The Scriptural poems—Cædmon—*Judith*—The *Christ*—The Lives of Saints—Other sacred poems—Secular poems—The *Ruin*—The *Wanderer* and *Seafarer*.

It would seem likely that the whole of the work mentioned in the last chapter, though it may have been here and there rehandled in a Christian sense, is heathen in origin. But the bulk of Anglo-Saxon poetry,[1] a bulk which is not itself very large, is entirely Christian in tone, and is definitely religious in subject. Probably not a twentieth part of the *Corpus Poeticum* in oldest English, putting *Beowulf* aside, has for subject anything but paraphrases of the Bible and Lives of Saints, which in their turn are paraphrased or translated from Latin originals. Although the texts are handled in some cases with sufficient freedom, it is undeniable that this fact communicates to Anglo-Saxon poetry not merely a certain monotony, but also a very distinct want of first-hand interest — a want which extends over its whole period, and to prose as well as to verse.

Anglo-Saxon poetry mostly sacred.

Yet it would have been extremely surprising if anything else had been the case. In the first place, it is always necessary to remember — especially in face of the extravagant eulogies of which it has been the subject, as a revulsion from the equally extravagant, and because more simply ignorant much more discreditable, contempt which it had undergone before—that this literature is, after all, the literature of a childhood, the lispings of a people. No vernacular writings other than their own can have been before these ancestors of ours, for none existed. Although, after the welter of the Saxon Conquests had a little subsided, culture of no such beggarly kind was to be found in England, it was necessarily, if not confined to, yet centred in the

[1] Most of the texts referred to in this chapter will be found in Grein-Wül(c)ker or the Exeter Book, or both ; where to find the others will be noted.

clergy and the monasteries. More classical knowledge, not merely in Latin but in Greek, undoubtedly survived during the darkest of the Dark Ages than the sciolism of the eighteenth century used to allow; but there is also no doubt that the tide—the incalculable, inexplicable tide of knowledge and thought—receded steadily all over Europe from the fifth century to the tenth. In the first years (which in such an age are the first centuries) of conversion to a new faith religious zeal thinks no subject but religion worthy of attention, and in the contented reaction therefrom professional guardians of religion think nothing but religious matter worthy of preservation. It is more wonderful that we have any profane poetry at all—not for the present to mention prose—from this time, than that we have so little.

The verse, profane in small proportion, sacred in large, which dates from the period succeeding the comparative settlement of the Saxon realms, and which, though almost the whole, if not the whole, of it is West Saxon in its present form, seems by pretty common consent to have been originally composed in Northumbria, survives to us for the most part in four unique MSS. Of these three are the aforesaid Cottonian, which, besides giving us *Beowulf*, contains an incomplete poem on *Judith;* the so-called Junian Manuscript, now at Oxford, which contains the poems attributed to Cædmon, four in number, three of which are paraphrases of the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel, while the fourth is a composite piece to which the title of *Christ and Satan* has been given; and the Exeter Book, containing, besides *Widsith* and *Deor*, a poem or poems on *Christ*, others on *Azariah* (one of the Three Children), *St. Guthlac*, and *St. Juliana*, a large collection of verse-riddles, and not a few smaller poems, sacred and profane, the complete list being given in a note.[1] The fourth, called the Vercelli Book, from its rather unexpected place of discovery sixty years ago, gives among Homilies a variant of one of the poems (the *Address of the Soul to the Body*) in the Exeter Book, two very interesting Lives of Saints (St. Andrew and St. Helena), the *Dream of the Rood*, which is at least of the highest interest as a puzzle, a short poem on the *Fates of the Apostles*, and a fragment on *Human Falsehood.*

MSS.

Some notice of the more remarkable contents and characteristics of these poems will be given presently. As to their authorship, which has been much discussed, we practically know nothing whatever

[1] First come a score of pieces arranged by the Germans and Mr. Gollancz, as *Christ;* then *Guthlac, Azarias, The Phœnix, Juliana, The Wanderer, The Endowments of Men, A Father's Instruction, The Seafarer, A Monitory Poem, Widsith* ("The Scôp"), *The Fortunes of Men, Gnomic Verses, Wonders of Creation, The Rhyming Poem, The Panther, The Whale, The Soul to the Body, Deor, Riddles* (in three batches), *The Exile's Complaint, A Fragment* (sometimes interpreted differently), *The Ruin*, and a few minor pieces.

about it in any case. But the Venerable Bede, in a charmingly told and commonly known story, has related how a certain Cædmon, who towards the end of the seventh century was a servant of the monastery of Whitby, under the great abbess Hilda, having had to leave festive meetings owing to his inability to use and accompany with song the harp which was handed round, was miraculously inspired to write sacred poetry. And the contents of the Junian MS. were, from the first attention paid to it in Milton's days, identified with this, while much later the discovery on the Ruthwell Cross, some miles from Dumfries, of the words "Cædmon made me," forming part of a Runic inscription (the rest of which coincided pretty closely with part of the *Dream of the Rood* above mentioned), was for a time thought to confirm the idea. Again, examiners of the poetry of the Exeter and Vercelli Books found in some of them Runic charades or acrostics which compose the name "Cynewulf"; and out of these dead runes a great poet who wrote not merely the poems in which they appear, but others, has been resolutely manufactured and equipped with a life, sentiments, and experiences extracted by critical imagination from the poems in question. Further, the work formerly attributed to Cædmon has been taken to pieces with the usual industry and dexterity of the Separatists, and a considerable portion of it heaped upon Cynewulf with the corresponding industry and dexterity of the Agglomerators; the *Dream of the Rood* has been confidently assigned to the new favourite; and the poems in general have been divided into A's and B's, credited or debited with interpolations, dated, redated, and undated. In particular, much stress has been laid on the recent discovery of corresponding Old-Saxon fragments of a *Genesis* version in the Vatican.

Cædmon and Cynewulf.

But with these things we do not busy ourselves. The testimony of so trustworthy a historian as Bede establishes the existence of a Whitby poet named Cædmon, who, miraculously or otherwise, displayed sudden and unexpected faculties for song, and composed poems on the Creation and several other Biblical subjects before the end of the seventh century. The Ruthwell Cross [1] and a reliquary preserved at Brussels show phrases and passages taken, or very slightly altered, from the *Dream of the Rood*. From the well-ascertained historical facts

[1] This extremely interesting monument is now well cared for and enshrined conveniently for inspection in an apse built for it in Ruthwell Parish Church. It was ordered for destruction in the evil days of the seventeenth century (1642), but only broken into three pieces and left in the churchyard, where it remained till 1802. It was then set up in the manse garden, and in 1887 put in its present place. There is a facsimile of the cross (which is nearly 18 feet high, and may date from the end of the seventh century) in the Museum of Science and Art, Edinburgh.

of the superiority of Northern to Southern culture, and of the complete, or almost complete destruction of both, but especially the former, by the Danish fury at the end of the eighth century and later, it is reasonable to conclude that these poems were written in Northumbria, and before 800. But of the exact date and the exact authorship of no one of them can anything be said to be certainly known; and if the rune-charade of Cynewulf is correctly deciphered, this signature cannot be accepted as going more than a very little way to establish even the most shadowy personality. As for their autobiographic character, it will be time to take this seriously when it is shown that the author of *Maud*, who, it may be pointed out, certainly did visit Brittany like its hero, also shot his beloved's brother in a duel, and passed some time in a madhouse afterwards.

We are therefore left with the poems themselves, and they will afford us quite sufficiently interesting study. In the all-important point of prosodic form they resemble those mentioned in the last chapter, except that in some at least the alliteration is still more precisely managed; while in others, especially in the poems first attributed to Cædmon, the line is almost indefinitely extended at times by the admission of unaccented syllables, so that it becomes more impossible than ever to adjust the whole to any rhythmical swing tunable to modern ears. Even the comparatively rudimentary metrical nisus of *Deor* does not seem to have agitated any of these singers, and if it were not for the accented and alliterative syllables, the whole would bear the appearance of embryonic rhythmed prose, for which it was actually taken until the scheme of Anglo-Saxon prosody was discovered.

Of their subjects, and of the extent to which they display such non-metrical properties of poetry as phrase, arrangement, and poetic spirit, there is naturally more to be said. In regard to subject, they may be divided into three groups—the directly sacred poems with a fringe of allegorical verse, in which the fantastic zoology of the Dark and Middle Ages is adjusted not unhappily to religious use; a very small but very precious body of poetry without a purpose, or with only a subordinate one; and a miscellaneous collection of riddles, charms, gnomic verses, and "oddments" of different kinds. The last group is chiefly, if not wholly, interesting to the philologist and the student of manners and civilisation, though some of the riddles have not a little poetical merit; the others are of wider appeal.[1]

[1] Anglo-Saxon poetry in translation is best represented by a very close rendering, stave for stave, with the words kept as far as possible and their order likewise. Straightforward modern prose may come next; any modern English verse form last, the resemblances and the differences of language and rhythm alike making it dangerously misrepresentative.

The sacred poems may again be subdivided into three classes—paraphrases from the Scriptures or poems directly based on them, Lives of Saints, and miscellaneous devotional work.

Of the first subdivision, the chief interest, if not the chief merit, belongs to the Cædmonian *Genesis* and *Exodus*, especially to the passages in the former which respectively bring to mind the Bede story, and the supposed indebtedness of Milton in *Paradise Lost* to the eldest of his poetical forefathers, with whose work he might actually have been acquainted through his friend Junius the editor. With regard to the first point, no actual English equivalent of Bede's Latin abstract or paraphrase (he warns us that it is only this) occurs in Cædmon; but there is in one MS. of the History a very old and possibly original Northumbrian version, transliterated into West Saxon in King Alfred's English Bede. Neither of these agrees in wording with the opening of the so-called *Genesis A*, but the meaning is sufficiently near to suggest different wordings of the same original draft. As for the Miltonic parallels, some of which are extraordinarily close, they come chiefly but not wholly from the other part, or *Genesis B*, where the paraphrast is drawing on apocryphal or mediæval legend (and himself) for a description of the sufferings of the Fallen Angels. Both parts of *Genesis* and *Exodus* have, when the subject gives opportunities, bursts of poetry by no means contemptible, and by no means wholly due to the original; and the first named is a poem very considerable in bulk. It runs, taking it as a whole, to nearly 3000 lines, of which not a few are of enormous length. *Exodus* (the best part of which is naturally the crossing of the Red Sea) has not quite 600. Of the others, *Daniel* has seldom been praised; *Christ and Satan*, which includes a fine description of that very favourite subject, the *Harrowing of Hell* (interesting as possibly the first to compare with Langland's, certainly the best in any like poetic dress), is much better.

The Scriptural poems. Cædmon.

About *Judith* doctors differ much, and its authorship is sheer guess. We have only the end of it, but that, giving in some 350 lines the slaughter of Holofernes and the triumph of the Jews, is the most interesting part of a story which has generally inspired both pen and pencil well, and which certainly does not fail to do so here.

Judith.

The Cynewulfian poem, or group of poems, which opens the Exeter Book, and which it is for the present the fashion to call *Christ*, certainly contains fine passages, the finest being inspired by that fruitful parent of mediæval poetry the adoration of the Cross. In Mr. Gollancz's arrangement it has nearly 1700 lines.

The *Christ.*

The Lives of Saints.

Of the four important Lives of Saints—*Andreas*, *Elene*, *Guthlac*, *Juliana*—all ascribed by some to Cynewulf, the palm may lie between the first and the third. *Andreas* is a legend of St. Andrew, telling how he was miraculously inspired and miraculously helped to cross the sea in order to release St. Matthew from prison in "Mermedonia"; how he succeeded, and how he punished the violence of the heathen to himself. The stormy voyage, always a favourite subject with Anglo-Saxon bards, and the rage of the elements on the doomed heathen city, are fine passages. *St. Guthlac* has perhaps fewer lines of the "show" variety; but the description of Guthlac's conflict in his loneliness with the powers of evil, and that of his death, are curiously fascinating, and worth comparing with *St. Simeon Stylites*. *Elene* (the English saint St. Helena, mother of Constantine and finder of the Cross) has admirers; *Juliana* fewer, owing to a long and rather tedious wrangle between the saint and a fiend who is sent to tempt her. But the recurrence of the name "Juliana" as a hemistich by itself, and in apposition rather than as direct object or subject, has almost a refrain effect, and soothes the ear marvellously. Indeed, though only occurring now and then, and on no system, it produces an effect not unlike that of the similar word "Oriana" in Tennyson's poem. The short *Fates of the Apostles* has little merit, but, as it is signed, some have wished to tack it on to the unsigned *Andreas*—a process slightly suggestive of what is said to be occasionally practised on violins.

Other sacred poems.

In so far as positive poetic beauty goes, the third subdivision, small as it is in bulk, has no reason to fear comparison with either of the others. The *Dream of the Rood* has, like *Genesis*, the adventitious interest of its connection with the Ruthwell Cross inscription, but could do without it. The *Rood* itself speaks, and speaks to the purpose. The *Address of the Soul to the Body*, existing in two parts,[1] the speakers being respectively a cursed soul and a blessed one, is the earliest of a long line;[2] and the speech of the reprobate has that peculiar grimness which is one of the most unquestionable gifts of Anglo-Saxon verse. The *Phœnix*, the *Panther*, and the *Whale*, adaptations of Latin verse or prose in the allegorical "bestiary" kind, are all fine, and the first has a famous and really exquisite passage, one of the few in this poetry to which the word can be applied, describing, after Lactantius, the beauties of paradise. "The Phœnix" itself, of course, is Christ; as is the "Panther," the sweet-breathed, lonely, harmless beast;

[1] The first occurs in the Exeter and in the Vercelli Books; the second only in the latter.

[2] See the interesting collection in the Appendix of T. Wright's *Poems of Walter Mapes* (Camden Society, 1841).

while the "Whale" (based upon the well-known Greek-Eastern story of sailors landing on the whale's back) is the Devil or Hell. These, as well as a mere fragment believed to be part of a similar poem on the *Partridge*, evidently came from some earlier Greek or Latin *Physiologus* or collection of zoological allegories; of the *Phœnix*, the original, by or attributed to Lactantius, is, as has been said, known. It is quite a long poem of nearly 700 lines; the others are much shorter.

Secular poems.

The small group of secular poems above referred to is of much greater interest, not at all because of any general or necessary superiority of profane to secular poetry—a point upon which two such great and dissimilar critics as Dr. Johnson and Mr. Matthew Arnold seem to have been led wrong by different but equally fatal fallacies—but because, the poems being in all probability original instead of pretty certainly translated or paraphrased, we can see much better what the real strength of the poets was. The *Ruin*, the *Wanderer*, the *Seafarer*, the (so-called) *Wife's Complaint*, the (so-called) *Husband's Message*, make a very small bundle of verse. Even in the Grein-Wül(c)ker edition, with editorial apparatus, corrected versions of text, and the like, they do not fill thirty pages; yet, for these thirty, one could cheerfully resign almost all but the few just-named passages of the sacred books (with perhaps a riddle or two) of the poetry mentioned in this chapter. For they are real documents; it is excessively unlikely that they had any originals in another language, and if they had, we at least do not possess these originals. Even "common form" was not, so far as we know, furnished to them by any predecessors, as it inevitably was to homilists and hagiographers, practitioners of sacred allegory, and paraphrasers of the Scriptures. Here, and perhaps here only, Anglo-Saxon poetry shows what it could do with a commonplace—the best subjects of poetry are all commonplaces—but without a common form; and it comes out of the test with no small credit.

The *Ruin*.

The best of the five is in my judgment beyond all question the *Ruin*. Indeed, I do not know any other Anglo-Saxon poem which in conception, composition, and expression so nearly deserves the name of a masterpiece. As we have it, it is in a state which strangely corresponds to its title and subject—a broken mass of some five-and-thirty lines, which the painful ingenuity of editors has got into about five-and-forty, rather more regular in some parts, but much wounded in others. Conjecture thinks that it may have been originally intended for the wreck, after Saxon devastation, of no less a Roman colony than Bath; there is, at least, nothing contrary to reason in accepting it as relating to one

or other of the many stately creations of the first invaders which were reduced to ruin by the second. The corruption of the text makes a certain rendering practically impossible. But nothing can obscure the genuineness of its poetry, or (as it seems to me) its enormous superiority to the possibly contemporary Welsh lament over the destruction of Uriconium with which Mr. Stopford Brooke rather unfavourably compares it. The Welsh piece shows a further advance in poetical form, more *clichés* ready for use, more tricks of trade and manners of behaviour. The English shows actual poetry. Perhaps the deepest and noblest of all emotions, not merely personal and sensual, the feeling for the things that are long enough ago, finds expression, and worthy expression, as the poet looks on the masonry shattered by fate, the crumbling mortar gemmed with hoar-frost, as he imagines the once stately heights reduced to ruinous heaps, the warriors, high of heart and bloody of hand (for though Shakespeare never knew the *Ruin*, we may borrow his phrase), who sat there long ago, the hot baths (this is the ground for the identification with Bath) boiling in their lake-like cistern, the busy market-place silent, the merry mead-halls overwhelmed by the fiat of Destiny. He could *see*, this poet of the *Ruin*, and he could tell what he saw. We shall hardly come to any one like him for seven hundred years in England.

The majority of critics, I believe, assign higher rank to the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*. The *Wanderer* also contains a passage of merit about a ruin, but is chiefly a study of "Weird" (Fate or Destiny), and the way in which a man is "hurled from change to change unceasingly, his soul's wings never furled"—as the most Saxon of nineteenth-century English poets has it—his comradeships incessantly broken, and only the Weird constant in its inconstancy. The idea of the poem is undoubtedly fine, and its lines give fair scope; but that poetic imagery which is so great a part of poetry seems to me not so well managed as in the *Ruin*. The *Seafarer*, longer still, and perhaps composite, is a much more difficult poem, as may be guessed from the fact that the critics are not agreed whether it is a monological reflection upon its subject or a dialogue between an old sailor and a young sailor, or only colourably occupied with seafaring at all, its real purport being an allegory of human life. It may be observed that this last interpretation, which seems to me much the most probable, is only to be avoided by the device, at once easy and violent, of supposing the close of the poem to be a Christian forgery, or at least addition. The chief literary merit of the piece is to be found in the earlier part, where the description of a wintry storm at sea, attributed by some to the old sailor, has

The *Wanderer* and *Seafarer*.

much of the merit already noted in Anglo-Saxon handlings of this subject.

The remaining pair, the so-called *Wife's Complaint* and *Husband's* or *Lover's Message*, have a more personal note than the others. The first appears[1] to some to be the utterance, real or dramatic, of a woman who has been falsely accused and banished from her husband's presence. The second is an agreeable piece, in which, with a pleasant seventeenth-century touch, the wooden tablet bearing the lines of the message is made (like the "book" addressed by later singers) itself to carry the tale to the beloved (or at least addressed) one. Neither is long, but both have an unpretentious and sincere feeling, if not exactly passion, and both stand interestingly at the head of a class of similar poems, in which English has since been richer than all other languages put together. They date too from a period long antecedent to that of either troubadour or minnesinger.

The arrest of Anglo-Saxon poetry by the Danish fury seems to have been very nearly total. The verse, other than mere sacred paraphrases, which we have of a later date than Alfred is but scanty even in total bulk, and only four pieces of it can be said to have much literary attraction, though, curiously enough, two of these are much better known than any of the older and better work. These are the short poem inserted in the *Chronicle* (*vide infra*), on the triumph of Athelstan at Brunanburgh over the Scots and Danes, and the very late, gloomy, but fine *Grave Poem* familiar to almost every Englishman who cares for poetry, with its beginning, "For thee was a house built."[2] In this latter the idea and the grim, direct, uncompromising delivery of it are the chief merits. The Brunanburgh poem, though a spirited war-song, perhaps attracted more attention by its setting of the stock Anglo-Saxon reference to the raven, eagle, and wolf, "that grey beast the wolf of the weald," as spoilers of the dead, than would have been the case if the earlier examples from *Beowulf* and the Finnsburg poem downwards had been known.

Of the two remaining pieces, one has the attraction of subject, the other that of form. The *Battle of Maldon* or the *Death of Byrhtnoth* has a less happy subject (a defeat not a victory) than the Brunanburgh piece, but it is more genuine, contemporary, and fresh. The

[1] It ought perhaps to be said that the usual interpretations of these pieces are more than half guesswork. There is really nothing in what Thorpe more prudently calls *The Exile's Complaint* to identify the speaker as a wife, nor anything in the other piece (his as prudently named *Fragment*) to point to a husband or even lover.

[2] Text in Guest, *English Rhythms*, 2nd ed. p. 369, or in Thorpe's *Analecta*, ed. 1868, p. 153. Longfellow translated it not long, I think, after Conybeare first made it known. It is thought to be as late as the twelfth century, and shows signs of *metrical* influence in its rhythm.

production known as the *Rhyming Poem*, or *Conybeare's Rhyming Poem*, is found in the Exeter Book. This, though far inferior in intrinsic and poetical interest, has great historical importance. It is probably a Biblical paraphrase, like so many others, and as it is in the Exeter Book, it must be as old at least as the tenth century, or the very earliest eleventh. Now, not merely at that time, but much later, Anglo-Saxon was rebel to rhyme ;[1] even two hundred years after, in Layamon, the appearances of that instrument are but occasional and very rudimentary. In the *Rhyming Poem*, however, though there is still alliteration, and the general structure of the lines is not very different from the staple of Anglo-Saxon verse, they are arranged in couplets, or sometimes even larger groups, not merely tipped with end rhymes, but endowed with leonine or middle rhymes as well. Sometimes the rhyme is not much more than assonance, but oftener it is full rhyme, and not seldom it adopts the kind which later English poetry discourages, though it is allowed in other languages, the actual repetition of the same complete words or group of letters, *onwrah*, *onwrah*, *hiwum*, *hiwum*, etc. Once there is a batch of seven lines with the same rhyme—*ade*, varied a little by *ide* and *ede*—in the middle and at the end of each ; in another place one of five lines similarly equipped with words in *iteth ;* and sometimes the couplet shrinks to a single line with leonine adjustment. Of course this is inartistic and overdone : the poet is thinking so much of his new toy of rhyme that he has not much time to think of his poetry. But he is ahead of his fellows by two centuries if not by three, and that is something and much.[2]

[1] There were, however, other outbreaks, or rather *in*breaks of it. See especially the remarkable verse-fragment in the *Chronicle* (A. 1036, edited in Grein-Wül(c)ker, i. 384-85), describing Godwin's outrages on the "guiltless etheling" Alfred and his men.

[2] This *tour de force*, which is only partially intelligible, and in which there is good reason to suppose the invention of words for the purpose, has been thought to be imitated from Icelandic. A few things of little literary interest—paraphrases of the Psalms, a dialogue of *Solomon and Saturnus*, a piece on Doomsday, etc.—complete the tale of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

CHAPTER III

ANGLO-SAXON PROSE

The works of King Alfred—The *Boethius*—The *Orosius*—The *Bede*—The *Pastoral Care*—The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*—Elfric—Wulfstan

THE prose division of Anglo-Saxon literature is of less literary interest than the verse; but it is more abundant in quantity, and it is not separated from the later developments of the language by any such sharp gulf as that which cuts off the prosody and rhythm of Anglo-Saxon from the prosody and rhythm of English. We may, indeed, observe in it that curious, yet, when considered, very far from unintelligible combination of earliness and immaturity, rapid development up to a certain point and inability to go beyond that point, which meets us in the poetry; but there is not the bar to any further development which existed in that case.

In all languages poetry as literature comes before prose, the immortal jest of Molière owing its piquancy to exactly this, that though prose is more obviously natural to man in conversation, he never, till after considerable experience, seems to understand that it is fit to be made a medium of recorded thought or formal writing. But it would appear that it was, in Anglo-Saxon, pretty early. Professor Earle speaks [1] of "obscure but well-evidenced remains of the fifth and sixth centuries," but as so enthusiastic an authority does not himself dwell much on these, or on the laws of Ina attributed to the seventh, we may afford to pass them over. It is in the eighth century that Mr. Earle claims something like literary competency for the earliest English prose, and the examples which he chooses are a deed of remission of port dues by King Ethelbald of Mercia, and the somewhat famous passage of the *Saxon Chronicle* relating the death of King Cynewulf (*not* the poet), the first of these dating a little before and the second a little after the very middle of the eighth century itself. With the later passage, too, Mr. Sweet begins the prose specimens

[1] *English Prose*, London, 1890, p. 370.

in his *Anglo-Saxon Reader*,[1] and it seems to be generally allowed the position of the earliest distinctly spirited piece of prose literary composition in the language.

To such spirit, or, in other words, to the motive power of *style*, laws, title-deeds, and similar documents can, in the very nature of the case, seldom lay claim. It would, in fact, be decidedly out of place in them, and the bare enumerations, specifications, common forms of legal and other speech, etc., which they contain could be of little illustrative use, even if they were not, as in most cases they may be suspected to be, pretty closely copied from Latin originals. But the story of the attack made by the atheling Cyneheard on the King Cynewulf, when the latter had imprudently left most of his guard behind while visiting a lady-love, gives better opportunities. The incident is told at no great length, and without much personal characterisation, except in the notable answer of the thanes to Cyneheard's offers of bribes and arguments from kinship, that "no kinsman was dearer to them than their lord, and they never would follow his bane." Except that the piece seems contemporary, one would imagine a rough prose "unrhyming" of some ballad or romance. But if we are to consider the thing as prose merely, it may give us some pause to find that of the two authorities above cited, Mr. Sweet, though giving it the high distinction of being "by far the oldest historical prose in any Teutonic language," thinks the style "of the rudest character . . . abrupt, disconnected, obscure, and full of anacolutha," while Professor Earle discerns, and thinks that every one must discern, the evidence of "a literary tradition already of mature standing," and "a syntax not more rugged than that of Thucydides." Thucydides has, of course, a sort of traditional repute for crabbed syntax, so that the eulogy is, after all, not unqualified.

By the next century (the ninth), however, there is no doubt about the plentiful production and the at least relative accomplishment of Anglo-Saxon prose. Of the three writers of it who alone may be said to have a personal reputation, King Alfred, Elfric, and Archbishop Wulfstan, the first belongs to this century, the last third of which was covered by his glorious and beneficent reign. The *Saxon Chronicle*, in its continuous and fairly accomplished shape, may be a little older than Alfred himself, though it is thought to have taken final form under him. The King and the *Chronicle* will at any rate well deserve separate and independent notice.

Alfred's works are, with the exception of some original insertions, wholly translation—indeed, as we have seen with the verse, so we

[1] Oxford, 7th ed. 1894.

shall see with the prose, and to an even larger extent, that the merit of originality in matter is about the last that Anglo-Saxon as a literature can claim. But in the special circumstances this makes far more for the King's honour than for his dishonour. His literary work was inspired not by any desire of fame, nor by any need of satisfying a peremptory personal craving to write, but wholly and solely by the wish to benefit his people, to do something that might help England out of the slough of barbarism into which she had been plunged by the Danish ravages and the efforts necessary to check them. To this end it would have been not merely presumptuous, but, in the circumstances and at the time, positively silly to have attempted original composition, when there was plenty of good Latin work lying ready to hand. From this Alfred selected a book in what may be called general practical science, the *History and Geography* of Orosius; one in domestic history, the unrivalled *Ecclesiastical History* of Bede; the most popular ethical and philosophical treatise of the Dark Ages, the *Consolation* of Boethius; and an ecclesiastical book, the *Cura Pastoralis* of Pope Gregory. The first of these is not precisely a work of genius or one of much authority, but it was a popular manual of its day; the second and third could hardly have been bettered for the purpose, inasmuch as they were the work of two men who represented the best character and ablest intellect of the age immediately preceding, and whose thought, style, and tone were in complete harmony with the spirit of the actual age; the fourth was a respectable book, well suited for the purpose, and having some special claim on the attention of Englishmen.

The works of King Alfred.

The most interesting of the four,[1] in so far as actual matter goes, is the *Orosius*, because of the additions which Alfred made from information supplied to himself; but the most interesting as literature is unquestionably the *Boethius*. There are many greater books in the literature of the world than the *De Consolatione;* but there are few that have had a more interesting literary history, and still fewer that seem to have, with such strange prescience, gauged the literary and philosophical requirements not merely of their own time but of times that were to follow for almost a millennium. One of the first documents in English prose is this translation of King Alfred's; probably the very first document in the earliest development of the Romance tongues, Provençal, is the verse-paraphrase which gives us the majestic if slightly monotonous harmony of

The *Boethius*.

[1] The *Boethius* and the *Orosius* are easily obtainable in Anglo-Saxon (old-printed) and English, in Bohn's "Antiquarian Library." The E.E.T.S. has given critical editions of the *Orosius* and the *Bede* and the *Pastoral Care*. A version of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies* is probably also Alfred's.

the *langue d'oc* a century or two after Alfred. When Anglo-Saxon and the Middle language have at length given place to complete English, the most accomplished piece of prose that the all-accomplished muse of Chaucer admits among his greater verse is again a translation of Boethius; and yet another translation, this time partial, is attributed to Queen Elizabeth, at the very time when the far-off heralding of Alfred, the directer promises of Chaucer, were about to be fulfilled.

As "the last of the Romans" is not now in every one's hands, it may not be superfluous or impertinent to say that Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, as his barbarically assorted travesty of the old Roman nomenclature went, was born somewhere about the beginning of the last quarter of the fifth century. He is said to have studied under Proclus at Athens, which is possible, but barely possible, if the death of Proclus be taken at the ordinary date of 485. He attained distinction at Rome, and having been consul in 510, attracted the notice of Theodoric the Ostrogoth, and was for some time in favour with him. But being accused of fomenting or conniving at an Italian conspiracy against Gothic rule, he was imprisoned at Ticinum, and brutally put to death (clubbed, it is said) in or about 524-525. The *De Consolatione Philosophiae* is supposed to have been written in prison. It was not his only contribution to mediæval knowledge, for he exercised an immense influence on scholastic logic by his commentaries on Aristotle and Porphyry and Cicero; but it was perhaps his most popular and non-technical. It consists of a medley of dialogue between Wisdom and the author, interspersed with metrical insertions. Two versions of Alfred's translation exist, in one of which the metrical portions are rendered into prose, while in the other they are versified. Although there is difference of opinion on the subject, there does not seem to be any insuperable difficulty in admitting both forms as authentic, though very likely the King had help from others. If the "metres" in their Anglo-Saxon form are really his, they are of the greatest interest to the literary historian, because they show that at this time Anglo-Saxon was proof against the temptations of rhyme, classical metre, and the like, to which in its enfeebled Early Middle English or "Semi-Saxon" stage it afterwards succumbed. The translation is by no means slavishly executed; indeed, the reproach of want of originality against Anglo-Saxon generally is largely mitigated by the fact that the translations are much more paraphrases with interpolations *ad lib.* than simply faithful versions. It is quite possible that deficient scholarship may to some extent account for this freedom, but it would be as uncritical as it would be illiberal to take this as the sole, even as the chief, reason. Alfred's moral purpose in the *Boethius*, like his scientific and practical purpose in the *Orosius*,

induced him and authorised him not merely to rearrange, but to add gloss and comment here and there. It is a pity that, in the edition of the *Boethius* most accessible, a rhymed and sophisticated Englishing by the late Mr. Martin Tupper takes the place of the rendering into rhythmical prose which alone can give any proper equivalent for Anglo-Saxon verse in modern English.

The *Orosius*, it has been said, has, or rather would have, nothing like the intrinsic interest of the *Boethius*, were it not for the insertions, which in the *Boethius* itself have chiefly the interest of curiosity. Paulus Orosius was a Spanish priest, who was a disciple of St. Augustine's in the second decade of the fifth century, an antagonist of Pelagius, and a friend of St. Jerome. He wrote, as befitted an Anti-Pelagian, a book about free-will, and other matters; but his name has been chiefly preserved by the work which Alfred translated, the *Historia adversus Paganos*, one of the numerous summaries of universal history which the decline of classical times and the Dark Ages saw, but differentiated by a special intention to refute the Pagan argument that the decline and fall of the Roman Empire were due to the neglect of the ancient deities. It is, for the most part, a mere compilation from previous compilations, and in no part a work of any literary merit; but like all books of the kind, not hopelessly incompetent, it has the advantage of keeping the general course of history before the reader. It would, however, be folly to suppose that Alfred had any philosophical consideration of this kind in view when he chose the book. It was an orthodox and popular manual, it gave opportunities for insertions of a kind specially interesting to himself and specially useful to his people, and he took it and altered it accordingly, displaying, as in the *Boethius*, no great reverence towards the text, but in the nature of the case making somewhat smaller alterations in arrangement, and rather fewer additions of reflection and suggestion, though in parts a good deal more reduction to the character of an epitome. The *Orosius*.

The interesting parts, to us, are the insertions in the earlier chapters on the geography of Northern Europe, beginning "Othere told his Lord King Alfred," and "Wulfstan said," these being either known, or reasonably taken to be, reports of voyages either distinctly made under the King's commission, or at any rate indicating his desire for the best and latest direct information. Othere tells of a voyage to Lapland and the White Sea; Wulfstan of an exploration of the Baltic, and especially of the Esthonians, the folk about the mouth of the Vistula. It should be observed that both the *Boethius* and the *Orosius* are abundantly furnished with vernacular "contents" to facilitate their reading and understanding by the people.

Alfred's translation of Bede's History has yet again a different kind of interest; and to us it is especially welcome because it brings the Venerable one within the compass of a history of English literature. Invaluable as Bede in his Latin dress is to the historian proper, he would have been dearer to the literary historian if he had lived a little later, so that he might have been tempted to write in the vernacular. That he could have done so there can be no doubt, for he was, as the famous and charming description of his death by his reader Cuthbert says, "learned in our poetry," and on his deathbed summed up the situation—the vanity of all knowledge but such as will guide a man's soul right at the last —in a memorable stave of five Anglo-Saxon verses. But in his day—he was born in 673, entered the monastery of Wearmouth at seven years old, was soon transferred to that of Jarrow, and lived his whole life there, dying in 735—it was more important to digest learning, both sacred and profane, in Latin for popular consumption, and this Bede did. Even as it is, the interesting story of Cædmon referred to above may be said to be the beginning of English literary history, and here Alfred's translation (or another's if it was not his) is particularly important, because, while Bede's account is in Latin, it has preserved to us what may possibly be the very words of Cædmon's actual inspiration.

The *Bede.*

At any rate, the translation of Bede shows us that Alfred was not so anxious merely to instruct his people in general and foreign learning that he wished to divert their attention from "things of England"; and it is impossible not to take it in conjunction with the great enterprise of the *Saxon Chronicle*, of which, as an aspirant to learning once remarked in an examination (probably taking the *Chronicle* for a daily paper), "Alfred was editor."

The fourth book has, at the present day, the least interest for us in itself. Gregory's *Regula* or *Cura Pastoralis*, as far as its intrinsic claims are concerned, must be studied in the original; and, moreover, Alfred, either out of respect or otherwise, has here translated much more exactly than in the other cases. But fortunately he prefixed an original introduction, and this introduction contains a constantly quoted and extremely important account of the state to which polite learning in England, in the middle of the ninth century, had been reduced by the Danish invasions. "There was a time," quoth Alfred, "when people came to this island for instruction, now we must get it from abroad if we want it." "There were," adds the King, "very few on this side Humber who could so much as translate the Church Service or an ordinary Latin letter into English [for "Englisc" has taken its place once for all as the general name of the tongue], and not many on the other side"

The *Pastoral Care.*

(there being still apparently remnants of the old Northumbrian culture). There was not, he ends, with a gentle and more than pardonable boast, one such south of Thames, when he himself took the kingdom. It has been well pointed out that though this decay of culture may have been lamentable in itself, yet it was fortunate in a way for English, inasmuch as it stimulated translation, and so gave practice in the vernacular, instead of tempting men, as Bede had been tempted, simply to abstract and compile in Latin itself, and, even when they wrote original work, to write it in Latin. The translations may not be of first-rate literary importance, but they are at any rate better than the Latin summaries; and precious as the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is, it would have been ten times more precious had it been in English, if only because the actual original text of Cædmon could then have been given.

Other works of Alfred are spoken of—especially a Commonplace-book or book of Table-talk—which should have been interesting; but they have not survived. The so-called *Proverbs of Alfred*, in Middle English, to which we shall come in due time, have value, and may to some extent represent work of the King's, but they can hardly be accepted even as a direct modernised version thereof. It is, however, at least possible that the *Chronicle* itself in part represents his work, as it certainly represents his influence, and it is in any case by far the most important monument of Anglo-Saxon prose, carrying us, with at least only partially broken sweep, in contemporary vernacular history from the middle of the eighth century to the middle of the twelfth, preserving amid drier annals some exceedingly interesting fragments of composition of the more original kind, both in prose and verse, manifesting an ability to manage the subject which was only much later shown in other vernacular languages, and bridging for us, with a thin but distinct streak of union, the gulf between the decadence or ruin of Anglo-Saxon even before the Conquest and the rise of English proper more than a century subsequent to it.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.*

Like other works of the kind, and indeed necessarily, the *Chronicle*[1] was the work of monkish labour—one of those things by which the lazy monks, the drones of the Dark Ages, earned the polite and intelligent contempt of the philosophers of the eighteenth century. And it followed from this that it should not present a single text, or even sequence of texts, but should exist in more versions than one, as the work was carried on at different centres. The first of these centres was, as might have been expected, Winchester, for the historical use of English prose had not been discovered in

[1] The *Chronicle* was printed as early as 1643, and has been repeatedly reprinted, re-edited, and translated since.

the palmy days of Northumbrian literature, and Winchester was by far the most important place in Wessex, when the balance of power had been definitely shifted thither. The Winchester *Chronicle* is vigorous and full for the days of Alfred himself and Edward the Elder, but becomes rather meagre for the second and third quarters of the tenth century. It makes up for this, however, by inserting verse, the most important piece by far being the already-referred-to poem celebrating the battle of Brunanburgh. By the end of the century the tradition of chronicling seems to have died out in the Hampshire capital, and to have shifted to the metropolitan city of Canterbury, to Worcester (the main bulwark of England against the South Welsh border, and far from Danish reach), and to the rich and important abbey of Abingdon. The Winchester series extended a little beyond the Conquest, but the latest batch of English chronicle comes not from here but from Peterborough, in the neighbourhood of which the national, as opposed to the Norman, spirit was always strong. One of the very best known passages of the whole—the constantly quoted description of the sufferings of the country under Stephen's robber-barons and in their castles—comes from this last batch, and indeed represents the final utterance of English historical writing for the time. It was stifled by the brilliant, but in the history of English literature irrelevant and interpolated, outbursts of Latin chronicle-writing which the middle of the twelfth century saw, and which only gave place later to the verse of Robert of Gloucester, and later still to the now fully English prose of Trevisa.

It would be more than a little unreasonable to expect that such a conglomerate, or batch of conglomerates, as the *Saxon Chronicle* should present any uniform literary features. The variations of hour and man make that quite impossible. At first, and indeed at intervals throughout, we get the barest annals, sometimes mere obituaries or calendars of translations, consecrations, coronations, and the like, only interrupted occasionally by less jejune accounts of the founding of a monastery, of such events as the assassination of Cynewulf at his leman's house, etc., where accident, personal interest, the chance possession of a poem or a deed, filled the writer's pen. Then, again, the wars of Ethelred and Alfred and Edward against the Danes inspire something like a regular history. The Peterborough part, as might be expected from its later date, has, in so far as we possess it, still more of this irregularity.

The two remaining known and distinctive writers of Anglo-Saxon prose come under the disqualification which attaches from the purely literary point of view to religious writers, in all cases but those of a very few periods and a few individuals outside them—the disqualification not at all that they are religious, but that they are second-

hand. But the first of them, Elfric, is undoubtedly the greatest prose writer in the language. The influence and example of King Alfred, if it had not founded English prose, had at least given a great impetus to the founding of it, and this impetus was followed up throughout the tenth century, which has even, by some enthusiasts, been hailed as one of the great prose periods of the whole English language in its widest sense. Essential importance is assigned to the work and teaching of Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, a pupil of Dunstan, in the middle part of the century, who is thought to have had a wide influence, in connection with his fostering of the Benedictine rule. The first proof of this is the collection of Anglo-Saxon sermons called *Blickling Homilies*;[1] while the greatest and most lasting is the work of Elfric, which in parts spreads beyond merely ecclesiastical or theological limits. Elfric,[2] who was a pupil of Ethelwold, as Ethelwold had been of Dunstan, began to write in the last decade of the tenth century, and first executed a large set (some eighty) of Catholic Homilies, which he followed up later with a series of homiletic Lives of the Saints in an alliterative rhythm, distinct from prose, but not quite reaching the limits even of Anglo-Saxon verse. His other writings were numerous, and include an interesting little set of books for the instruction of Englishmen in Latin—a grammar, a glossary, and an agreeable, interlined, Latin-English colloquy, which is the earliest example of the Hamiltonian-Ollendorfian method as applied to English. Elfric, of whose life not much is known, though he became abbot of Ensham near Oxford, and whose death-year is uncertain, is accused by some of having been rather too fond of alliteration even in his undoubtedly prose work, which includes translations of parts of the Bible. But his style is distinctly clear, flowing, and vigorous, and though only the enthusiasm above referred to could possibly see in it a medium suited for general literary exercises, it probably carried Anglo-Saxon as far in that direction as the immature character of the language itself permitted.

Elfric.

Elfric's life considerably overlapped that of the third writer referred to, Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, at whose consecration in 1014 Elfric himself wrote one of his tractate-sermons by command. Wulfstan, who was for many years Archbishop of York, and during part of the time Bishop of Worcester

Wulfstan.

[1] Ed. Morris, E.E.T.S., 1874, *sq.* Not later than 971, probably earlier.

[2] To be distinguished from an archbishop of the same name with whom he was long confused, and from his own pupil, Elfric Bata, who re-edited the *Colloquy*. An Elfric Society was formed more than fifty years ago to publish him; and its work has been resumed by the E.E.T.S. There is a pretty full selection in Thorpe's *Analecta*.

also,[1] has left over fifty homilies,[2] and a letter to the English people, or those of the province of York, which has interest. It is, however, quite impossible to grant the title of "fine prose," which Professor Earle postulates, either to his or to Elfric's, much more to the passage from another, to which the Professor especially refers, a figurative description of the Lord's Prayer:[3] "And his thought is more springing and swifter than twelve thousand holy ghosts, though each and every ghost have sundrily twelve feather-coats, and every several feather-coat have twelve winds, and every several wind twelve victoriousnesses sundrily." The conceit is vigorous and pleasing, and the compounding power of the language, which it has left to its heir, is observable in *sigefæstniss*, "victoriousness." But the arrangement and construction are of the very simplest kind, clauses of the same model being merely agglomerated. In Wulfstan we find more attempt at periodic prose than here; but the periods are inartistically arranged, and that fault which was later to mar so much seventeenth-century prose, the inability to resist the temptation of adding and piling up epexegetic clauses, already appears.[4]

[1] Distinguish again from the much later Bishop Wulfstan under the Conqueror.

[2] Ed. A. Napier, 1883.

[3] *Op. cit.* p. 382. The piece is from a prose form of the *Solomon and Saturn* dialogue.

[4] The list of A.S. prose is, of course, by no means exhausted in the examples given. There are laws, "leechdoms," short tales, Biblical translations, etc. The most interesting are, for their connection with later and romantic literature, the story of Apollonius of Tyre (the original of *Pericles*), ed. Thorpe, 1834; a version of the episode of Alexander and Dindimus, and the wonders of Ind, from the great legend history of Alexander (ed. Cockayne in his *Narratiunculae*); and for its matter, Bishop Werfrith's translation (with a Preface by King Alfred) of the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory. This, which contains some quaint and characteristic things, was long inedited, but has at last appeared (ed. Hecht, Leipzig, 1900) as the fifth volume of Grein-Wül[c]ker's *Bibliothek der angel-sächsischen Prosa*.

CHAPTER IV

THE DECADENCE OF ANGLO-SAXON

It was long, and very naturally, a popular opinion that the Norman Conquest sufficiently accounted for, and directly caused, the practical disappearance of Anglo-Saxon literature. But the revived study of that literature itself, though it may in some cases have produced rather an exaggerated estimate of its intrinsic interest and merits, helped, and was helped by, the previous study of political historians to correct this delusion. Just as it was seen that the Norman Conquest, mighty as were its effects, was no absolute political cataclysm sweeping away the first England and replacing it with something else, to the same extent and in the same manner as those in which the Saxon Conquest had swept away Roman Britain, so it was discerned that the Conquest only helped and turned to good a process in language which had been independently begun, which was going on rapidly, and which, but for the Conquest itself, might have had more disastrous results.

In other words, it has now for some time been recognised that Anglo-Saxon, as a literary language, was, if not slowly dying, at any rate slowly passing into some other form, long before William landed at Pevensey. It is impossible to mistake the significance of the facts that it had produced at that date no poetry that can be called great, and little of any kind for some two hundred and fifty years; that its prose, though vigorously started under the highest auspices, and though brought to some measure of relative perfection by men like Elfric and Wulfstan, was itself failing, and had never, except in the form of generally meagre chronicle, produced any original non-sacred literature. There must have been something wrong, some want, some coldness in the literary constitution, to account for this. A language by weakness, by accident, by ill luck may never produce literature at all. But if it produces things like the *Ruin* and the *Phœnix*, like the best parts of the poems attributed to Cædmon, and those thought to be signed by Cynewulf, and then does nothing

more—if it practically limits its prose energies to homilies and paraphrases and strictly business jottings, then undoubtedly it wants a change.

In the second place, it is admitted that the language itself was showing signs of a complete "break of voice," of an important biological alteration. Its inflections were getting loosened and weakened, whether from inherent old age or from the attraction and competition of the rival inflections of French and Latin must be matter of conjecture. But it appears that a similar change was taking place in its Continental kin. That its warring dialects had very much to do with this may be doubted. The West Saxon had after the downfall of Northumbria taken a distinct lead; and it does not seem that at any time the dialectic variations constituted an insuperable bar between Englishman and Englishman. But they must have helped a little, though they no doubt did less than the constant and age-long effect of the practically bilingual education of every man who aimed at learning in Latin as well as in English, and than, latterly, the establishment of French as a second, if not a first, court language in the Confessor's palace. The fact, however, seems to be beyond dispute, and the inevitable literary consequence of the fact still more so. You cannot write literature in a language which is not sure of itself, which is crumbling day by day. To which we may add that the signs of senescence and degradation are as evident in prosody as in the other parts of grammar proper. We have, as has been said, very little late Anglo-Saxon poetry, and the dates of what we have are extremely uncertain. But we can be nearly sure that in all of it strict alliteration was breaking down, rhyme was breaking in, and that for a time the contemptuous term absurdly applied to the true English prosody which emerged later, that of a "jumble," might have been applied without much injustice. Our ancestors at this time had lost grasp of their own rhythm and not learned metre; just as they were getting to mumble Anglo-Saxon, and had not learned to speak English. The old order was changing in every way, but it was some time before the new could get into regular form.

This is the rational and sufficient, the only rational and sufficient, explanation of the whole matter, that the time had come for Anglo-Saxon to die, that it died, and that it would have had to die if Harold had been as victorious at Senlac as at Stamford Bridge, though probably the result would have been less fortunate for England, as it would pretty certainly have been quite infinitely less fortunate for France. For it must never be forgotten—though it would be hardly an exaggeration to say that it has seldom been remembered—that France had little or no literature to give England,

and that what she had (a *chanson de geste* or two, and some verse saint-lives rather less formless than England's own) were things of little importance and less influence. It is an amiable but entirely unhistorical imagination to suggest that French literature was brought to England by the Conquest. There was little or none to bring; and what arose later would have been equally brought by the increasing popularity of the French language and its vigour in face of Anglo-Saxon decay. Nay more, some of the greatest things in Old French were written under English influence, in districts which, though not English in soil, were under English rule, on subjects which were supplied by England from Teutonic as well as from Celtic stores. It is not insignificant that in the oldest French literature, the *Chansons*, "Normans" are spoken of with as much dislike, and sometimes in the same terms, as the perfidious Englishman of a later date has enjoyed. It is of even more significance that, although the original texts of the great Arthurian legend were, no doubt, all written in the French language, they are written on a "British matter," and partly by Englishmen. We had lost the key of our word-hoard: we had indeed never possessed any, had simply been fumbling for one, in regard to the largest and richest part of it. Latin and French, Latin even more than French, helped us at last to forge the proper keys of language, of style, and, best of all, of prosody. But they did not put the treasure there, they only helped us to find it and use it.

INTERCHAPTER I

To the short, but it is hoped not absolutely insufficient, account of Anglo-Saxon literature contained in the foregoing Book, there will now, according to the system explained in the preface, be subjoined a general summary of its accomplishments and character, disengaged from the previously necessary survey of individual facts.

We have seen that in its comparatively scanty bulk, and under the disadvantages of a political history not indeed short in time but very unsettled, and but scantily equipped and supplied by civilisation, Anglo-Saxon succeeded in producing work both in prose and verse which has not only intrinsic merit and interest, which has not only the additional historic claim of being the ancestor of one of the greatest literatures of the world, but which has the further attraction, also historic, but surely not negligible, of being for its time unique, or having only Icelandic for a doubtful competitor. Icelandic itself was probably some two centuries behind Anglo-Saxon in the use of vernacular prose.

But it is exceedingly important to take stock of the exact literary value of the accomplishments of this language both in themselves and in relation to its great descendant. One thing that Anglo-Saxon did is fortunately beyond all dispute. It "unlocked the word-hoard"—a word-hoard still very much in the rough, and with some disadvantages which will be considered more specially below. Like some metals, it needed blending with others before it became thoroughly useful. But in native strength, in backbone, in the power of standing rough usage and being the better for it, it had perhaps no superiors, and it possessed certain valuable, or rather invaluable, qualities. In particular, it had that gift which some languages almost wholly lack, of forming compounds freely. Cædmon's famous *heolster-sceado*, *holster-shadow*, "cover or sheath of darkness," gives at the second opening of the literature a measure of its capacities in this way, and they can hardly be exaggerated. A language that cannot combine thus, or can do it only with difficulty, is a poor thin thing, the worst stuff possible for poetry, and

fit only for decent, perhaps elegant, but uninspired and uninspiring prose.

In prose itself, however, Anglo-Saxon did not do very much, and it could hardly be expected to do very much. It had not the subjects; its writers had not the demand; and if by any chance any man had both subject and demand, there was the fatal mistress Latin tempting him away from the homely English wife. For almost every man of letters was an ecclesiastic, and almost every man of letters, ecclesiastic or not, looked to the public not merely of his own burg or realm, but of Latin Christendom, which had its own universal tongue. Moreover the fully-inflected condition of Anglo-Saxon has to be taken account of, and its dialects, and above all the extreme insecurity and instability of political and social conditions at the time. War and ruin may sometimes—they do not by any means always—repay in song what they have exacted in suffering; but prose as a rule requires prosperity, business, leisure for its cultivation. However this may be, it is certain that, as literature, the achievement of Anglo-Saxon in prose is very much less than its achievement in verse, though there may be a less abrupt separation between this achievement and what follows in the same medium.

In poetry it did more, and there are few points of more importance for the general study and comprehension of English literature as a whole than a comprehension of the general poetical equipment and accomplishment of Anglo-Saxon. And as estimates of these points have too often varied between the extremes of passionate and partisan appreciation on the one hand, and complete ignoring or unfair, perhaps sometimes ill-informed, depreciation on the other, such a general view has not been very easy to obtain. Yet there is no real difficulty in taking it.

Anglo-Saxon poetry, then, as we see it in the sufficient if not very plentiful remains of its best period before the end of the eighth century, displays merits of what we may call poetical intention considerably surpassing those shown by most literatures in their early stages, and at least equal to those which some literatures have shown at stages far more advanced. It has passion—not so much in the conventional and limited sense of the passion of love, with which it deals very little, as in the general sense of subjective intensity—of evidence in song that the poet has felt, seen, thought, or at least wondered, with a deep and genuine movement. And much of this action of thought and feeling is directed to natural objects, in a fashion again very rare in most literatures, and almost entirely absent from some. Yet again, though the resources of form, of art at the poet's command are undeniably scanty and rude, yet, such as they are, they are used with care and skill. In other words, and this is no

mean praise, the Anglo-Saxon poet at his best, and that pretty frequently, has no mean portion of the poetic spirit, and has a just reverence for what he knows of the poetic art. In the first respect the author of *Beowulf* is at least not less richly and variously endowed than even the author of the *Chanson de Roland;* in the second, the author of the *Phœnix* is very far ahead of the author of the *Poema del Cid.*

But valuable, or rather invaluable, as are these equipments, every Anglo-Saxon poet from first to last during the Anglo-Saxon period proper suffers from two drawbacks which hamper him cruelly—monotony of subject and clumsiness of form. In both respects his limitations are hardly even in the smallest degree a reproach to him. When we remember that, so far as is known, absolutely no great literature except Greek has ever been produced without other pattern literatures before it; when we remember what was the comparative civilisation of England up to the eighth century after Christ, and of Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries before Christ; when we remember further that Anglo-Saxon culture never had so much as a single century of quiet development on the great scale under favourable political and social conditions, and that hardly any profane patterns were before any but a very few writers, we shall certainly not feel inclined to indulge an ignorant and conceited contempt of the limitations of subject to religion in the main, and out of religion to a little legend, a little contemporary war-song, some rudimentary science, and the thinnest surplus of other matters. Take any poet from Chaucer to Tennyson and strip him only of what he owes in subject—putting other debts, and they are large, out of sight—to his predecessors, and a terrible reduction would have to be made. Cædmon, if Cædmon it was; Cynewulf, if Cynewulf there was; and all the anonyms, had practically no predecessors to oblige them, except the Bible, a few hymn- and homily-writers, the Fathers, and a small, a very small, part of the profane classics which had not gone utterly out of fashion or of reach.

Of what, under this immense, this to us simply incalculable, disadvantage they accomplished much must have perished, while what has perished *may* have largely exceeded what we have, not merely in bulk but in variety. On this head at least there is no fault to find, but rather infinite credit due to our ancestors, that while no other—Icelandic, perhaps, excepted—of the modern European languages had yet found its tongue at all, or had found it only to let the results disappear, they did what they did.

Nor is there exactly any "fault to find" with the defects of art and means which also beset them, but in this respect somewhat harsher language must be used. In the first place, putting enthusiasts

aside, I do not think that any one can call Anglo-Saxon, in familiar phrase, a "pretty" language. Though not without a grave undertone of music in it now and then, it has a distinct uncouthness. Its inflections give it monotony without music; the rough consonant terminations give the word-structure an air rather of a dry-stone wall unwrought by hand than of cunning masonry. Afterwards, when this roughness was blended with softer forms and matter, it was to give the most perfect poetic medium—more perfect even than Greek—that has ever existed; at this time the destined completion had not been reached, and the language, full of forms in one way, was still formless; crammed with possibilities, was still void, chaotic, rudimentary.

That it chose the prosody most suited to it is no doubt true. Every language has, and must inevitably have, the prosody that it deserves, the prosody of which it is capable, whence is clear the folly of those who desperately attempt to force it into prosodic forms other than those into which it naturally goes. And that Old English prosody has limitations and shortcomings, probably inseparable from Old English vocabulary, there is little if any doubt. But there is no doubt at all that the limitations and the shortcomings are of the most serious character. With some of the objections made to the Anglo-Saxon *Ars poetica* we need by no means concur. The common complaint that there are no similes may be called almost silly. In the first place, there *are* similes; and in the second place, if there were none, why should there be any? The only possible answer that suggests itself turns upon such a childish argument or no argument as this, "Homer is a great early poet; Homer is rich in similes; therefore early poets who have no similes are not great." Moreover, simile or no simile, Anglo-Saxon poetry, like its cousin Icelandic, is admittedly rich in metaphor, which is only simile in the making. When a poet has once called the sea the "swan's path," and thought the "breast-hoard," he has shown himself perfectly competent to write a simile in twenty lines—a simile like that at the end of the *Scholar Gipsy* itself—if he chose to do it. So too we shall not, if we are wise, shake our heads because it is rather long before we come to epanaphora or antithesis in Anglo-Saxon poetry. The absence or the slow coming of epanaphora and antithesis is no doubt very disheartening, but, as Deor himself has it, this also may we overgo.

The real faults of Anglo-Saxon poetry from the formal point of view lie in, and indeed are inseparable from, its staple of accented alliterative verse, it may be discretionary, it may be quite carefully and cunningly arranged as to syllables, but divided by a hard and fast section or middle pause. That fine effects in certain limited kinds may be and have been got out of this arrangement need not

be denied; that it was a great advance on mere systemless chaos is of course undeniable. It lent itself with ease to that parallelism which is the most natural note of half-civilised poetry. The accents gave something of a "stand-by," something of a backbone, to save the rhythm from becoming merely prosaic. The alliteration supplied a musical charm which has never died out of English poetry, and therefore never can die out of it. The sections helped the parallelism, acted as stays to the prentice poet, and assisted the accent and the alliteration to give something like a real poetic form, as opposed to the form of prose. For a certain meditative kind of poetry, like that of the *Ruin* and the great *Phœnix* passage, the whole scheme is well fitted, and it does not do badly for romantic narrative, whether in its earliest form, as in *Beowulf*, or in its latest and almost last, as in Layamon. Nay more, it seems by no means absurd to find in it, as I believe some even of its specialist students are beginning to do, the germs not indeed of later English poetical rhythm, but of that wonderful English prose rhythm which, aimed at half-blindly from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, found, whether consciously or not, in the seventeenth, but never deliberately practised, much less deliberately analysed, till within the last hundred years, has given something almost as much a pure hybrid between poetry and prose in form as drama is a hybrid between them in spirit.

But the defects of its qualities are many and great. When the normal scheme, with few unaccented syllables, is kept, it is excessively apt to become dull, monotonous, sing-song. When, in the poet's need for a longer line and greater variety, it receives the Cædmonian extension, it becomes perilously suggestive of the "patter" which has been consecrated in more modern times to burlesque and grotesque. The excessive and regular alliteration not only becomes wearisome to the ear, but also, and inevitably, occasions the selection of words not because they are the right words, but merely because they begin with the right letter. And the sectional pause is the worst of all. It will always remain the most astonishing thing in that extraordinary monument of learned and ingenious paralogism, Dr. Guest's *English Rhythms*, that he should have failed to perceive that the beginning of great English poetry is synonymous with the abolition of the compulsory middle pause, and should even have endeavoured to convict Shakespeare and Milton of *lèse-poésie* because they do not obey it. That the middle pause is wanted in very long lines may be freely granted; in short ones and those of moderate length it cannot without disadvantage be more than a rule which admits the freest and most frequent exception.

It is probably due to these faults and disabilities, rather than to

any want of genius, that the Anglo-Saxon poets did not do more than they did, and it is again and again to be repeated that it is surprising how much they did. But their poetry, indeed their whole literature, is a rudimentary literature, a literature *in statu pupillari*, and one which has not passed any but the lower stages even of pupilship. Even if the most elaborate theories of its prosody be admitted, the case will not be altered: for a certain etiquette of detail is consistent with a very early novitiate. It can manage simple prose very well, but it cannot achieve anything that requires style in the proper sense, though it can manage bombast. In the poetry we have been briefly reviewing we find some noble passages, especially of a serious and reflective cast, a few more showing the joy of battle well, still fewer, but some, evincing accurate observation and the power of putting it into words. But the class of poetical effects attained, and to all appearance attainable, is exceedingly limited, and excludes altogether those of the lighter kind. There is practically no lyric—a want which would of itself and at once relegate any poetry to a position below, and far below, the highest. In short, we have here a juvenile effort, as we may call it, of immense interest, but doomed in itself to failure, because the person or people making it has not come to its full strength, has not entered into possession of its full property, and is using clumsy methods and tools on a scanty material, instead of employing the results of the experience of the past in method on the gathered treasures of the past in stuff.

BOOK II

THE MAKING OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE TRANSITION

The sleep of English—Awakening influences—Latin—French influence—Geoffrey of Monmouth—Latin prosody in the early Middle Ages—The Hymns—Alliteration and rhyme—Rhythm and metre—French prosody—Syllabic equivalence in English—Helped by Anglo-Saxon—Law of pause in English.

To say that English literature[1] dives underground some time before the Conquest, and does not emerge again till about the year 1200, would be an exaggeration; but it would only be an exaggeration of the truth. As a matter of fact, we have nothing certainly dating from any part of this long period of a hundred and fifty years except the later passages of the Worcester and Peterborough *Chronicles*, the latest of which does not go beyond the year 1155, though just before this there are pages of merit, especially that famous one already referred to as to the sufferings of the English people under Stephen. It is probable that the *Grave Poem*, and perhaps some other fragments in verse, date from this time; it is tolerably certain that some of the Anglo-Saxon Homilies and Saints' Lives which we possess, either as more or less original compositions or refashionings of older ones, date from it. But these

The sleep of English.

[1] There is unfortunately no adequate literary history of the Middle English period. Vols. iii. and iv. and the earlier part of vol. v. of the late Professor Morley's *English Writers* deal with it, but are chiefly occupied with a crowd of extraneous matters. Ten Brink (vol. i. books ii. and iii.) is much better, but not all-sufficing. There is ample information in vol. ii. of the Variorum *Warton* (London, 1871), but it is necessarily chaotic and indigestible. Luckily the texts themselves are now fairly, though not fully, accessible; unluckily they have too often been edited from the merely linguistic point of view.

things only touch the fringe of literature, and there are extremely few of them.[1] Yet during this long sleep, so scantily broken, a process was going on analogous to, but far more momentous and thorough than, the ordinary refreshment by the "season of all natures." We have said that the powers of English, not merely as a literature but as a language, were obviously failing even within the very restricted circle in which they had walked before the Conquest itself; it remains now to indicate as briefly as possible what the influences were which came to transform and refresh these powers, and how they went to work. The actual instruments were two, Latin and French; and their working was directed to three different points of attack—the alteration of the language as such; the suggestion of new subjects and forms of literature; and, above all, the construction of a new prosody.

The notice of literatures and literary works not English has been limited, according to the plan of this book, to the strictest necessities, and among these necessities the present occasion must be counted. We can, moreover, economise under the first head of the last division, for the mere linguistic side of the matter but faintly concerns us. It is sufficient there to say that the different inflections of French and Latin (as, it is thought, the different inflections of Danish had already done) helped the already displayed tendency of the language to shake off inflection almost if not altogether, though this was a work of time; and that the swelling of the vocabulary with Latin or Romance words, though inevitable, is not, as we shall see when we come to actual literature once more, very noticeable in the first place. The effect of the exhibition of new forms and subjects was much more momentous, and to understand it we must try a "Pisgah-sight" of Latin and French literature as each then was.

Awakening influences. Latin.

In considering the effect on English of Latin, we must not assume, as used to be assumed, that classical Latin was out of the ken or knowledge of the early Middle Ages. It was not; and there were then Englishmen, such as Joseph of Exeter, who could write excellent hexameters on a fairly Virgilian or at least Claudianic model, though they might sometimes condescend to leonine or middle rhyme; while, as we need not go beyond Chaucer to show, large parts of the classical poets, especially Ovid, were distinctly familiar. Indeed, it may perhaps be said with safety

[1] For instance, Mr. Morley ekes out the assumption that "no doubt" there was verse, with the well-known Canute Poem, *Merry sang the monks of Ely*, the verses attributed to Godric of Finchale, and *Sumer is icumen in*. But if the Canute Poem has any interest of authenticity it must be much older, and *Sumer is icumen in* is pretty certainly much younger, than 1050-1150. Godric (d. 1170) is more to the point. His verses are but the meagrest scraps, but they show *rhyme* and *metre*.

that of all classical writers Ovid had most influence, though others had some. But the singular and still slightly puzzling thing in connection with this subject is that readers, even readers of considerable education and great ability, seem to have observed no critical proportion whatever in their relative estimate of authorities, either from the point of view of matter or from the point of view of form. They preferred in the "Tale of Troy," not merely to Homer, whom they knew but little, but to Virgil, whom they knew fairly, and to Ovid, whom they knew well, two beggarly abstracts assigned to a certain Dictys and a certain Dares, for which they had absolutely no external authority, and which bore internal marks of absolute worthlessness as literature, if not of absolute untrustworthiness as history. They swallowed, though they had abundance of fairly sober abstracts of history, if they had not all original authorities, huge farragos of mere fairy tales about Alexander. And, generally speaking, the actual classics exercised, naturally enough, much less direct influence upon them, especially in the point of form, than the writers of the decadence and the darkness from the fourth century downwards. And, as was yet more natural, they attached more importance still to the Services of the Church, to the devotional writings of ecclesiastics in verse and prose; while by degrees they began to elaborate for themselves an almost entirely new system of philosophy, which the natural clearness and precision of Latin enabled them to make admirably systematic and scientific in terminology, though the terms might be barbarous in form. With Anglo-Saxon failing, and no other vernacular except the distant and thoroughly isolated Icelandic come to full maturity, the practice of history-writing became for a long period entirely Latin, and the usage of that tongue in the schools further established it as the language not merely of philosophy but of general science.

The spoken influence of French, or at least Anglo-Norman, was naturally even greater, for it was for centuries the only court language, the language of superior business, and to some extent at any rate the necessary vehicle of communication between the upper and lower classes, though not between the lower classes themselves. But its literary influence was very considerably less. What has been already said must be repeated, that at the time of the Conquest, and much more, therefore, at the time of the first influence of French at the court of Edward the Confessor, the foreigners had little, or practically no, literature to offer as an example to England. They had no prose; their great national epics were only beginning; it is improbable that they had any finished lyric in durable form; the romances proper were in the British division not yet written (they had pretty certainly to come from England itself), and in the case of the classical division were

French influence.

only beginning to be written. French drama was lisping or still inarticulate; the great French *genre* of the *fabliau* was hardly born. In short, French literature could exercise no influence, because it as yet was merely struggling for existence itself.

No doubt, when it once began it made gigantic strides, while it so happened that the parts of France where some of these kinds saw the light were directly under the rule of or closely connected with the Kings of England. Provençal led the way, though probably not by much, in formal lyric; and more than half the Provençal-speaking districts were sooner or later brought under English rule by the accession of the Angevins and the marriage of Henry II. with Eleanor of Guienne. The British and Roman "matters" were specially Norman in place of treatment, and from England itself came a book which, though in Latin, had such an enormous influence upon English literature that it must receive exceptional treatment here. This is the *Historia Britonum* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, which was probably written almost simultaneously with—at least within a decade or two of—the last gasp of pure original Anglo-Saxon in the *Annals* of Peterborough.

Not much is known of Geoffrey, who must, however, have either been one of the most superlatively lucky persons in literary history or an original genius of the greatest mark. He was certainly consecrated Bishop of St. Asaph in 1152, and must have died about two years later. His book is dedicated to Robert, Earl of Gloucester, who died in 1147, so that it cannot be later than that date, while some have put it back ten or fifteen years earlier. He himself claims (with almost transparent "make-believe" as it seems to some) to have had a British original brought to him out of Armorica by a certain Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford. But nothing has ever been seen or heard of such a book, and even "Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford," is difficult, if not impossible, to identify. Nor have any other materials for Geoffrey's *History* been traced, save that in the case of its most famous, though far from its largest episode, the story of King Arthur, certain germs, excessively meagre in substance and very uncertain in date, can be found in certain documents attributed to Gildas, a monk of the fifth century, and Nennius, an unknown person who may have written in the seventh, the eighth, or the ninth, if not later, together with a *Life* of Gildas, which is certainly not much, if any, earlier than Geoffrey.[1]

Geoffrey of Monmouth.

[1] Geoffrey himself, Gildas, and Nennius will be found conveniently translated in one volume of Bohn's "Antiquarian Library," entitled *Six Old English Chronicles*. I do not know any translation of the *Vita Gildae* (ed. Stevenson), and the Latin published half a century ago for the English Historical Society is not very accessible. The texts of Nennius vary a good deal.

The debt which English literature owes to this curious book is not limited to the Arthurian part, for Geoffrey has given us the original story of *King Lear*, the most heartrending of English, or any, tragedies ; the ending at least of *Comus*, the most exquisite of English, or any, masques ; and other things. But in magnitude, in interest, and as a literary *origin*, the Arthurian invention dwarfs all other things in the book. It should be observed that by no means the whole story of Arthur, as we familiarly know it from Sir Thomas Malory's greatest of all compilations, is in Geoffrey. He represents the treason of Vortigern to Britain as partly repaired by two brothers, Ambrosius and Uther. The latter, reigning alone, falls in love with Igraine, wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, gains her by the help of the enchanter Merlin, who has already played a great part in the story, and becomes the father of Arthur, who succeeds him, crushes opposition at home, marries a noble lady of Roman descent, Guanhumara (Guinevere), joins issue with and defeats the Romans on the Continent, is recalled by the treason of his nephew Mordred, whom Guanhumara has married, returns, defeats and finally slays the traitor, but is mortally wounded and gives up the crown, being carried to the Isle of Avilion to be healed of his wounds.

The Middle Ages, despite what we hear and talk about their defects of communication and the like, are famous for the almost unintelligible rapidity of their literary diffusion in some cases. But in none is this so remarkable as in the case of the Arthurian story, which, if not entirely invented on the meagre basis of Nennius by Geoffrey himself, can at most have some other basis of Welsh legends, chiefly about Merlin. We have seen that the book cannot have been written much earlier than 1130, and may not have been written till a few years before 1150. It appears that before the later date it was already turned into French verse by Geoffrey Gaimar, whose version is lost ; and shortly after Geoffrey of Monmouth's own death by Wace of Jersey, whose version remains. Fresh legends or sheer invention furnished Wace with some important additions, and, as we shall see, he handed it on to the first English handler of the story, the poet Layamon. But the development of the whole into a real romance occupied pens in verse and prose during the later part, probably the third quarter, of the century, in a manner the exact account and distribution of which is still a mystery. The chief credit used to be assigned, and the present writer is still inclined to assign it, to Walter Map or Mapes, a native of the Welsh marches, and the author not merely of a very curious and interesting Latin miscellany called *De Nugis Curialium*, but, by possible attribution at least, of a still more interesting collection of student poems, satires on church

dignitaries, etc., issued under the general *nom de guerre* of "Golias."[1] At much the same time, later or earlier, Chrestien de Troyes, a French poet, gave poetical versions of many parts of the legend. But the complete execution of this in verse or in prose belongs, in language at least, to French not to English literature, till it was magnificently vindicated for its native soil by Malory three centuries later. The probably earliest English version after Layamon will be found noticed in the next chapter but one, as that of Layamon will be found in the very next.

The opportunity of an example of unmatched pertinence has taken us a little way from the actual stream of English literature to illustrate the manner in which that literature drew its subjects from literatures other than English. This was all the more desirable because at this very time such new stocks of subject were simply pouring in from East and West and North and South alike. We must return to show how a change greater far than any mere introduction of subject—the introduction of the true and universal prosody of English instead of the cramped and parochial rhythm of Anglo-Saxon—came about, showing at the same time how the surviving virtue of that rhythm itself differentiates English metre, as it was to be, from that of other modern languages.

It appears probable, and the reasons which make it so have been already partly set forth, that it was Latin even more than French that effected this transmutation. It is therefore unnecessary for even the most sensitive patriot to be jealous of what has been rather absurdly called "the rhythm of the foreigner." Latin, to the Middle Ages, was not foreign in any country, just as it was mother tongue in none. It was in Church and State alike the common speech, the common literary stock of Christendom; the very Italian himself, and still more the Goths and Franks who spoke the other Romance tongues, had hardly more part in it than the Anglo-Saxon. And the Latin prosody, as well as the Latin vocabulary, that affected English poetry once for all in the centuries between 1000 and 1400 A.D. was Latin enormously changed by influences which may have been themselves barbarian in origin. It is improbable that we shall ever exactly know the causes of the change which we first observe in Prudentius, and which becomes ever more noticeable. It may be that, as some will have it, the elaborate classical prosody of Latin was a mere interlude, that "the rhythm of the foreigner" was introduced from Greece, and for a time superimposed with crushing

Latin prosody in the early Middle Ages.

[1] Both edited for the Camden Society by Thomas Wright, whose services to Middle English literature were inferior to those of no man dead or living, in his numerous editions of texts, and in his *Biographia Britannica Literaria* (2 vols. London—Anglo-Saxon Period, 1842; Anglo-Norman Period, 1846).

weight on a natural accentual prosody such as we see partly indicated in "Saturnian" fragments. But what is certain is that, from the end of the fourth century onward, there is observable a movement (whether of innovation or reaction is not here essential) which not only alters to the most material extent the quantity of syllables, but also, as a consequence or independently, conditions the structure of verse. And this change is seen more especially in the compositions which were certain to exert most effect upon the vernaculars, the Hymns of the Church. For not only were these sure to resound in millions of ears, the eyes corresponding to which were very unlikely to read written literature, secular or sacred, but the music by which they were accompanied was equally certain to familiarise the ear, and with the rhythm to impress it on the brain, and make it likely to be reproduced in vernacular composition, especially when the prosodic forms more specially belonging to that composition had gone almost entirely out of use.

The Hymns.

Now, the characteristics of this kind of verse were chiefly two, and each of these was in direct and striking contrast with the corresponding characteristics of Anglo-Saxon. In the first place, though alliteration might by accident appear in them, its regular presence as a distinguishing poetic form, a regulator and mainspring of rhythm, was entirely absent, and was replaced by rhyme[1] both middle and end, but especially the latter. And in the second place, the requirement of a certain number of "accented" syllables, not even itself insisted on with absolute rigidity, and accompanied by the vaguest and widest license of inserting syllables that were unaccented, was replaced by the system of definite *metre*, composed of syllabic integers either identical or equivalent.

Alliteration and rhyme.

Rhythm and metre.

This influence had already exerted itself on the so-called Romance languages, and so in the case of the second foreign influence—French—Anglo-Saxon found itself confronted with an ally of Latin, or let us say with a pupil who had already passed his freshmanship. But French had received the Latin influence and instruction in its own way. One of those strange and infinitely interesting, though also infinitely mysterious, idiosyncrasies of language, which students of philology and phonetics too often neglect, had brought it about that French should be a language in which the distinction of syllabic value (call it "long" or "short,"

French prosody.

[1] "Rhyme," not "rime." "Rime" in English means "hoar-frost," and we need not introduce an unnecessary ambiguity against the practice of all our greatest writers, save, perhaps, one. Nay, the suggested etymology of *ῥυθμός*, if false, shows the instinctive recognition of the fact, first formulated by Mitford, that "rhyme is a time-beater," not a mere tinkling tag.

"accented" or "unaccented," "heavy" or "light," or by any opposition of words which may be preferred as least controversial) is, and seems always to have been, less marked than in almost any other. It followed from this that trisyllabic feet—that is to say, feet in which one syllable is intrinsically strong, long, heavy, or what not, enough to take two weaker, shorter, lighter ones on its back and preserve them distinct from others—were never prevalent in French, and for many centuries have been non-existent. And it followed from this again that "syllabic equivalence"—that is to say, the principle by which one strong, long, heavy syllable may be substituted for two weak, short, light ones, and *vice versa*—has in the regular prosody of France never had any place, while even in doggerel, in comic songs, and the like, syllables, if they are not to count at full, have to be simply slurred or omitted, as may be seen in the printed works of the lighter French songsters.

Now there was, and from what has been said it will be seen that this also was natural, something of a reflex tendency in Latin non-classical verse to imitate this characteristic of the Romance tongues, which showed itself also in Provençal, in Italian, and to a less degree in Spanish. And undoubtedly the crucial question was whether English would follow it and them in this respect. For centuries, as we shall see, the question was undecided—nay, at the present day there are some persons of distinction who will have it that there is no syllabic equivalence in English, and who resort to slurring, to "extrametrical syllables," and to all manner of strange devices to twist out of this great, this cardinal, this supreme feature of our poetry. For it is this—the possibility, namely, of substituting almost anywhere, with due precautions, dactyl or tribrach or anapæst for iamb or trochee [1]—which, when the example of Spenser to some extent, and the inestimable license of the great dramatists far more, had given it an unquestioned right of place in literature, and when it had allied with itself the shaking off of the rigid cæsura or pause, endowed English verse with that astonishing and unparalleled variety of music which puts it at the head of the poetry of the modern world.

Syllabic equivalence in English.

And we should be doing Anglo-Saxon a grave injustice if we did not recognise that one of its main poetical features undoubtedly helped to bring about this blessed result, and that was the old license of putting in unaccented syllables almost *ad libitum*. Indeed, some authorities would recognise a formal and regular equivalence in Anglo-Saxon itself. The sectional arrangement of Anglo-Saxon

[1] Strictly speaking, of course only the tribrach corresponds to the trochee or iamb. But, as in Greek itself, dactyls and anapæsts (though not, I think, cretics or amphibrachs) claim a place.

was less beneficial, and would, if maintained, as there was for some centuries a blind effort to retain it, have been very mischievous. But here too the dramatists, with Shakespeare at their head, came to the rescue, and, with the aid of their mighty follower Milton, once for all established the following law :—

Helped by Anglo-Saxon.

In an English heroic line, as well as in any shorter one,[1] *the pause may fall* after the first or any subsequent syllable to the penultimate, *while there need not be any distinct pause at all.*

Law of pause in English.

But we must now see in detail what the actual history of Middle English literature was.

[1] In the Alexandrine and longer lines a pause *is* necessary, somewhere about the middle, when they are used continuously, though not always in isolated applications like Spenser's. But it is a question whether these lines are not more or less disguised *distichs*, a fact of which the sixteenth-century practice of printing them in halves was a clumsy recognition.

CHAPTER II

FIRST MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD

1200–1250

Layamon's *Brut*—The *Ormulum*—Its spelling—Its metre—The *Ancren Riwle*—The *Moral Ode*—*Genesis and Exodus*—The *Bestiary*—The *Orison of our Lady*—Proverbs of *Alfred* and *Hendyng*—*The Owl and the Nightingale.*

THE dates of the books—not numerous, but, in some cases at least, both important and interesting—which compose the first growth of Middle English literature, or what used to be called "Semi-Saxon," are known with very little certainty. But a *circa* of reasonable probability can generally be attached to them, and there seems very little doubt that about the close of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries something like a distinct first-crop made its appearance. It is natural that the subjects of this new literature should, like those of the old, be at first mainly religious. But they soon ranged more widely, and, as it happens, the most important of all in bulk and in contents, if not also in actual literary quality, is secular.

Layamon's *Brut.*

This is the famous *Brut*[1] of Layamon, which we possess in two forms, one assigned by scholars to the earliest and the other to the latest years of the half-century which has been subsumed for this chapter. The differences between these two versions, though occasionally, as in the case of the name of the author's father,[2] a little puzzling, are of great value for linguistics, and they are by no means unimportant for literary history proper, inasmuch as we perceive in the later version the distinct enlargement of the intrusion of rhyme, which is already noticeable in the earlier. But in mere contents the later version is, somewhat contrary to the wont of mediæval times, shortened rather than watered

[1] Ed. Madden, 3 vols. London, 1847.

[2] In the earlier text we have "Layamon the son of Leovenath," in the later "Laweman the son of Leuca."

out; and it is also in much worse condition, having suffered by that too famous fire in the Cottonian Library which plays in Early English literary history an actual and historical counterpart to Caleb Balderstone's thunderstorm in fiction. Fortunately for the student of letters, both are contained in one of the best, as in one of the handsomest, editions which have fallen to the lot of any Early English classic.[1]

Layamon, the son of Leovenath, of whom we know nothing save from his own words, appears to have been a priest at Arley or Ernley (a village near Bewdley, on the Severn), into whose hands Wace's translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth fell. He combined with it, as he tells us, Bede, historical works by "Albinus" and "Austin," which have not been identified, though the first may have been some lost Latin original of Bede's own,[2] and (but this he does not tell us) apparently either traditions of the Welsh marches, near which he lived, or some imaginations of his own. The result is a *Brut*, or British History, of great length,[3] displaying occasionally no small literary power, very interesting as the first English book on the great legendary history of England, and absolutely priceless as showing the inroads which the influences described in the last chapter were making upon the effete rules and weakened powers of Anglo-Saxon.

In mere vocabulary the change is by no means great. Authorities differ as to the number of French words used, but none sets it above an almost infinitesimal proportion.[4] Yet the forms of the language are unmistakably altering, and the forms of prosody are altering more unmistakably still. The general structure is still the unrhymed alliterative line of two short sections. But an absolutely perfect example of the older form—four accents, three alliterations, no rhyme whatever, and a rhythm often not marked at all according to any metrical system, and only vaguely trochaic when sensible—is the exception, an exception appearing at long intervals. Constantly the alliteration is broken down. Very frequently rhymes appear between the line-halves—rhymes of a simple and obvious kind, "brother" and "other, "king" and "thing," "night" and "light," etc., but for that very reason all the easier, all the more tempting,

[1] Sir Frederic Madden's *Layamon*, like Thorpe's *Cædmon* and *Exeter Book*, was published by the Society of Antiquaries, which unfortunately did not find encouragement to go further.

[2] "Albinus" of Canterbury was one of Bede's authorities.

[3] Text A contains over 32,000 lines or half-lines; Text B seems to have had about 24,000, of which more than the odd 4000 are lost or damaged. The older practice of printing Anglo-Saxon verse in half-lines is distinctly preferable here, because the change of rhythm and the inroad of rhyme are more clearly shown.

[4] Madden allows about 50 in A, about 80 in B; Professor Skeat puts the total at 170.

and all the more frequent in occurrence. Most important of all, the unmetrical or vaguely trochaic cadence tends steadily towards, and sometimes reaches, the full and exact octosyllabic couplet, rhymed and complete. When we come across such a couplet as—

> Tha answeræde Vortiger,
> Of elchen ufel he was war ;

still more when we find that in the fifty years' interval between the two versions the terminations "Appollin" and "wel iwon" have been changed into "Appollin" and "of great win," the inference is unmistakable. Rhymed metre has challenged unrhymed rhythm, and is slowly driving it out.

As for the substance of Layamon, it may be regarded from two points of view: his additions to his predecessors, as far as we have these latter, and his handling of his subjects, original or added. The list of the former given by Sir Frederic Madden fills two large pages, and includes among its more important items the legend of Oriene (the name which Layamon gives to St. Ursula of the Eleven Thousand Virgins), a much fuller account of Rowena's appearance as Dalilah, the all-important additions to the Arthurian story that "elves" figured at the King's birth and took him to Avalon,[1] the foundation of the Round Table, and numerous details of Arthur's wars with rebels and invaders and Romans. From the latter point of view particular attention may be directed to the whole of the Rowena story, which Layamon works into a much completer romance-episode than any previous writer whose work has come to us,[2] and the whole of the Arthurian passages. These latter have not indeed received the immense addition to their interest which is given (possibly by Layamon's earlier contemporary and neighbour by birth, Walter Map) in the Anglo-French romances on the subject, but it is in itself a much greater advance upon Wace than Wace is upon Geoffrey, and it displays much more poetical capacity than the Jerseyman's. Indeed, when we give fair weight to the fact that Layamon was like an animal which is struggling out of its old shell or skin into a new one, and has not half completed the process, the poetical merit of his work deserves to be set far higher than it has usually been put. A "chronicler," as he is sometimes called, he is not, though he may

[1] Their queen is here "Argante," of course the same as the "Morgane" of the more usual stories and the "Urganda" of Peninsular revival in *Amadis*.

[2] It is luckily accessible to those who do not possess the whole in Morris and Skeat's *Specimens of Early English*, part i. p. 64. I could wish that (instead of the whole of *King Horn*, of which a fifth, or ten pages, would well suffice) much larger extracts from Layamon were given in this invaluable book. There is plenty to choose from.

have thought himself one. He is really the first writer of romance in English of whom we know.

The second great poetical work—or at least work in verse—of this time, the *Ormulum*,[1] is far inferior in interest of subject to the *Brut*, for it is simply one of the numerous and always more or less lame homiletic paraphrases of the Scriptures—in this case busied with the Gospels for each day. We have not the whole set, but a considerable part of it, extending to some 10,000 lines of fifteen syllables each, or double that number if the poem be divided into couplets of eight and seven. The author, of whom nothing is known except from this work, was one Orm or Ormin, an Augustinian monk, probably resident somewhere in the east of England, or in Northern Mercia. He addresses a certain Walter, whom he terms threefold his brother—in the flesh, in faith, and in monastic order. Of actual poetical merit it is not too much to say that Orm has nothing, and it is at the same time not paradoxical to add that his work is much more valuable by reason of certain characteristics which it possesses than one of much greater poetical merit without these characteristics could have been to us.

The *Ormulum*.

The first of his peculiarities lies in his spelling. It would have been in any case probable that the jostling of English by French and Latin should have effected some confusion in English pronunciation, while this confusion would also be assisted by the variety of dialects still prevalent in "Semi-Saxon." At any rate Orm, who seems to have been a purist in the matter, and to have had a sensitive ear, was offended by this, and determined to adopt a plan which should at least prevent short vowels from being sounded long and *vice versa*. In order to do this he seized upon the principle—sound English to this day, and fatal to what is called American spelling—that *caeteris paribus*, and in the absence of special knowledge to the contrary, a vowel before two consonants will be pronounced short in English, a vowel before one consonant long. And regardless of the extraordinary effect produced to the eye—indeed this was of less consequence before the days of printing, and of least in the days when reading was not so much reading as recitation—he steadily doubled the consonant after every short vowel, even when there could, as in the case of the infinitive *brinngenn*, "to bring," be practically no danger. The effect in appearance is naturally hideous and grotesque; as a monument in literary, or at least linguistic, history the practice (the observance of which the author solemnly enjoins on any scribe who shall copy his work) is priceless.

Its spelling.

As valuable, and more strictly literary, is Orm's metrical arrange-

[1] Ed. White and Holt, 2 vols. Oxford, 1878.

ment. His prosody is distinguished from Old English by being neither accentual nor (at least regularly) alliterative, nor tolerant of extra-metrical syllables. It is distinguished from classical Latin by having no syllabic equivalence nor any tri-syllabic feet. If its metre—a strict iambic form of tetrameter catalectic, or alternate dimeters acatalectic and catalectic—occurs anywhere in Latin hymns, it must be very rare, and Orm has no rhyme. The general opinion is that he adapted it from the hymns, in principle, whether from an actual example or not. But I suspect also the influence of French, where strict syllabic prosody had long been established.

Its metre.

Now nothing can be more reasonable as a matter of expectation, or more valuable as a matter of fact, than that in this period of groping and experiment, of endeavouring to suit the old bottle to the new wine, some one should have selected, as Orm apparently did, the method of hard-and-fast syllabic prosody, unhelped, uninfluenced even by rhyme. It is not a success; it is contrary to the genius of English, though strangely enough there are even now persons who cling to the idea. But there is no doubt that the attempt was one of the experiments which had to be made, if partially to fail, and that in the very failure it did good by curbing and restraining the English tendency to slipshod doggerel with rhyme to match.

Nor ought we to put the actual value of the *Ormulum* too low. It is stiff, monotonous, bolstered out here and clipped there to suit the hard-and-fast rhythm, occasionally of a most prosaic and provoking sing-song. But it ought to be remembered that sing-song was exactly what English wanted. It was the defect in cadence, the substitution of rhetorical for strictly poetical effect, which was the greatest shortcoming of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Here at least there was no such defect, though the verse not unnaturally tumbled into the opposite fault of too monotonous *ictus*, of an effect like that which has been whimsically transferred from the King of France in the rhyme to French verse, of marching up the hill and then marching down again with remorseless alternation. In morals to go into one extreme in order to cure the other is a dubious recipe; but in other matters it is the one most familiar, most generally applied, and perhaps most generally effective. That something better ought to come and would come than the half-alliterative, half-rhymed, half-rhythmical, half-metrical jumble of Layamon was clear; that it would be something also different from, and much better than, the stiff rhymeless cadence of Ormin was clear likewise. But this was the necessary tack in one direction as that was in the other, and between them, with other minor veerings to help, they brought the ship through the troublesome middle passage of the thirteenth and early fourteenth

centuries safe into the open sea where Chaucer took command, and where she has sailed since, and may sail, we hope, for evermore.

The third capital work of the earliest period of Middle English is not like the *Brut* and the *Ormulum* in verse, but in prose, though it resembles the *Ormulum* in belonging to sacred not to profane literature. It is thus less important than either in the history of literary form, though as an example of pleasant, easy prose-writing it shows a considerable advance on any Anglo-Saxon prose that we possess, and its interest of subject, of tone, and temper is very considerable. This is the *Ancren Riwle*[1] or Rule of Anchoresses, written by an unknown person for the guidance of three ladies who had taken the vows, but belonged to no order, abiding in a free female hermitage at Tarrant Keynes in Dorsetshire. This book is partly a devotional manual, six of its eight books, or "deals," being devoted to what the author calls the Inner Rule—the cultivation of the soul by guarding against sin and practising piety. The first handles services and ceremonial matters ; the last, the daily life of the recluses. The characteristic of these practical parts is a curiously wide and liberal spirit of charity, informed by good sense and human feeling. The hermitage of Tarrant Keynes was no Abbey of Theleme : its motto is *fais ce que dois* not *fais ce que voudras*, and the writer is perfectly well aware of what comes of the unlimited indulgence of sense and will. But he not only does not advise, he distinctly reprobates and forbids, excessive austerities, and is never weary of dwelling on the contrast between the Inner and Outer Rule, and the superior importance of the former. The strictly devotional parts are animated by a mysticism which is of the kindly order likewise, and the illustrations, parables, and the like are frequently of considerable literary interest, while the style shows at least possibilities of splendour as well as an actual command of ease.

The *Ancren Riwle.*

The rhyming productions of this period are of less individual bulk, but in almost every case (except those of the Homilies and Lives of Saints) they possess literary as well as linguistic importance. One or two of these, if we could believe some authorities, preceded even Layamon and Orm by the greater part of a century. But this, as will be seen, is nearly inconceivable.

[1] Extracts of this appeared in Wright and Halliwell's *Reliquiae Antiquae* in 1841-43. It was completely published by the Rev. James Morton for the Camden Society in 1853. The authorship is quite uncertain : it has been assigned to two Bishops of Salisbury ; Simon of Ghent, who died too late, 1313, to have written a book probably of the earliest years of the thirteenth century ; and Richard Poore, who was certainly born and lived at Tarrant, and whose time (he died in 1237) suits well enough. But there is no evidence of his having written it. It was widely popular, and was translated both in prose and verse.

The most important, perhaps, and according to the authorities just mentioned the oldest, is the somewhat celebrated *Poema Morale*, or Moral Ode, published early in the eighteenth century by Hickes.[1] This, which answers to its name, is a disquisition in verse on the rapid passing of life, on the fact that growth in years and in goods does not always, or often, mean growth in wisdom or in grace, on the importance of good works, the certainty of Judgment, and the like. It is, though necessarily dealing with commonplaces, good literature, and its metrical form is very remarkable; while the language, for all its age, is in parts so modern that scarcely anything more than the slightest alteration in spelling is necessary to make the first four lines intelligible:—

The *Moral Ode.*

> I am elder than I was in winter(s) and eke lorè;
> I wield more than I did: my wit ought to be morè;
> Well longè I have child ibeen in workè and eke in deedè;
> Though I be in winters old, too young am I in redè.

It will be seen that this form is different from anything hitherto noticed, and that it is identical, not only almost but altogether, with the most insignificant differences, with the swinging "fourteener" which was almost the staple verse of English literature at the end of the early and middle sixteenth century, and which has never gone out since.

Now Professor Ten Brink not only thinks that this metre is all but identical with Orm's, but believes that the poem may be as early as the reign of Henry I. The first position is, I think, a clear mistake. It is true that occasionally the lines of the *Ode* give us the full *Ormulum* fifteener with iambic cadence, while the feminine termination which distinguishes it is rigidly maintained. But as a rule, as the already given example will show, the first syllable is cut off, the cadence becomes trochaic, and what is more, there is a distinct tendency, if not to the definite insertion of trisyllabic equivalents, to a hop, a slur, a quaver, breaking the steady "thid-thud" of Walter's excellent brother. Nor is the rhyme a less important or a less disturbing addition. This, however, is one of those points which it may not be easy to make clear to a foreigner's ear—a fact which no doubt should render all foreigners chary of committing themselves on prosodies not their own. The other position is more arguable.

How is it possible, when we find after 1200 (the certainly earliest possible date of the *Brut*), even up to 1250 (that of the *Owl and Nightingale*, etc.), metrical as opposed to rhythmical scansion

[1] It has been several times reprinted, and will be found complete in two different texts (which are supposed to represent about the same difference, 1200 and 1250, as those of the *Brut*), in Morris and Skeat, *op. cit.* i. 194 *sq.*

barely struggling in, that not long after 1100 a perfect metrical swing of the modern kind should have been attained by one poet, and should somehow or other have failed to appear in any other? Observe too, that the rhyme is not middle-rhyme, the earlier, but end-rhyme, the later kind; that the author keeps it up with ease, instead of using only the most obvious and recurrent rhymes, and lapsing continually, as Layamon, much later than 1100, did. Of the language I do not profess to speak as an expert in even a slight degree. But of the metrical form I will say boldly that it is rather astonishingly advanced even for the middle of the thirteenth century, which is the time most probably assigned to it. And it would be almost equally astonishing if the rhymed *Paternoster* which we also have, and which Ten Brink assigns to the later half of the twelfth century, were of that date, couched as it is in the regular octosyllabic couplets which again we only find struggling into existence in Layamon. There will be few occasions in the course of this history on which we can allow ourselves even as much discussion of controversial points as this. But the order of the change in prosody is too important to dispense with it wholly here.

As it so happens, however (and here, as in the case of Layamon, the possession is precious not merely for philological but for true literary reasons), we possess more versions than one of the *Poema Morale*, and the comparison of them establishes the unlikelihood of an early date for its more finished metrical form. The sober and even yet hardly disputed authority of the late Dr. Morris does not venture to put even the elder of these earlier than "before 1200," the later he dates more plumply as "1250." And even in the 1200 version we see that the proper metrical form is only struggling out of the shell, which it has not thoroughly chipped till later. In the earlier we find such a line as this—

Elche time sal þe man of-þunche his misdade;

which becomes in the later—

On hwuche tyme so euer the mon of-þinkeþ his mysdede—

an almost perfect fourteener such as might have been written (were it not for the *th* letter) in the early sixteenth, or for the matter of that in the late nineteenth, century. And generally it may be laid down with the utmost confidence that the procession from rhythm to metre is astonishingly regular, and perhaps affords as good a test of date as any other. Here and there, of course, individual study or genius will make a start in front; individual clumsiness or the unfavourable nature of surroundings will cause another to lag behind.

But generally the procession is as regular as the growth of a tree; and it cannot be said to be in the least interrupted —it is at the most for a time paralleled and accompanied—by the curious alliterative revival which we shall have to notice in the fourteenth century.

A considerable part of the literature of this time is only literature by courtesy, Homilies and Lives of Saints, with rare exceptions, being merely refashionings of previous matter for present consumption. These are found both in prose and in verse, the latter gradually taking the form either of the rudimentary "fourteener" just noticed, or of the octosyllabic couplet, which, as we have seen, crops up even in Layamon. The so-called *Sawles Warde*,[1] a prose homily, has a certain interest because in one of those fits of agglomeration which have been and will be noticed, and which alternate with segregation in the philological ague, it has been sought to unite its authorship with that not merely of the *Ancren Riwle*, but of *Hali Meidenhad*,[2] the *Wooing of Our Lord*,[1] and the prose *Lives* of St. Margaret,[2] St. Juliana,[2] and St. Katharine. Identifications of this kind can at the best be conjectural, and are always exceedingly rash, but they may fairly be supposed to argue on the part of those who make them the apprehension of a certain literary unity in the styles as well as in the mere language of the different books. Even this is exposed to the objection that in matter which more than any other lends itself to the adoption of "common form," which is constantly based on similar Latin originals, and which must presumably have been written in schools of conventual practice, even a great similarity is probable without an identity of authorship being fairly to be inferred; while mere agreement in grammatical and dialectic forms is the very slenderest and most treacherous of clues.

There is much more purely literary interest in a verse translation or paraphrase of the books of *Genesis and Exodus*,[3] which appears to have been executed about the middle of the thirteenth century, and which has great attraction not merely for its extremely sharp contrast of language and form with those of the Cædmonian paraphrases, but for the intrinsic character of the form itself. Here is a passage:—

Genesis and Exodus.

> For sextene ger Joseph was old
> Quane he was into Egipte sold;
> He was Jacobes gunkeste sune,

[1] In full ed. Morris, *Old English Homilies* (E.E.T.S.); part of each given in Morris-Skeat, *Specimens*, vol. i.

[2] Ed. Cockayne, E.E.T.S.

[3] Ed. Morris, E.E.T.S.

Brictest of wasme and of witter wune ;[1]
If he sag hise brethere misfaren,
His fader he it gan un-hillen and baren.

Now it must be evident here to the most careless reader who has any ear that we have stumbled upon one of the most famous of English measures, the great *Christabel* metre itself, or in other words, the iambic dimeter with wide license of trisyllabic substitution, catalexis, and metrical truncation so as to interpose trochaic chords. The enormous influence of this (through Scott's hearing part of *Christabel* before it was published) has long been a commonplace of literary history ; and it has been also often pointed out, though less often, that it was only developed, not invented, by Coleridge, inasmuch as it occurs in Spenser's *The Oak and the Brere* (*Shep. Kal.* Feb.), and in other places, including even *Comus*. But not much attention has been called[2] to its occurrence practically full-fledged, though not with all its tricks of flight yet learnt, in the middle of the thirteenth century. And it cannot, I think, be necessary to point out how vain are efforts to make out an Anglo-Saxon ancestry for it. Except on the very rarest occasions, and then in the most distant and halting fashion, there is not even an accidental resemblance to it in any Anglo-Saxon verse from *Beowulf* to *Brunanburgh*. And there could not be, for it depends for its unmatched combination of freedom and harmony on exactly the two effects which Anglo-Saxon poetry lacked—metrical, not rhythmical, cadence and final rhyme. Only the first could give the freedom without doggerel license ; only the second could give "time beat"—the warning bell which prevents that license from being overstepped at the same time that it gives harmony to the verse.

A *Bestiary*,[3] of the same date or thereabouts—in itself one of the numerous mediæval renderings of the fantastic mystical zoology which was so popular, and which has already met us far earlier in the *Whale* and *Panther* of the Exeter Book—possesses interest of the same kind though rather less. This interest lies in the fact that it oscillates between unrhymed accentuation and rhymed metre ; for we shall almost invariably find (and it is

The *Bestiary*.

[1] "Brightest of form and of wise wont" (habits); *ger*, of course = "year"; *gunkeste* = "youngest"; *sag* = "saw"; *unhillen* = "un*hull*" = "discover." I have taken the text from the *Specimens* as more accessible, and also because some of the MS. asperities are softened, but the whole poem ought to be read to justify the above remarks.

[2] In the E.E.T.S. edition the metre is noticed, briefly, by Professor Skeat. But no attention is drawn to it in the *Specimens*, and it has, I think, been generally ignored in literary histories.

[3] Ed. Wright, *Reliquiae Antiquae*, i. 208 ; ed. Morris, *Old English Miscellany*, p. 1. Some in *Specimens*.

surprising that poets like Campion and Milton centuries later failed to discern the fact) that rhyme and metre are in modern languages almost indissolubly bound together—English blank verse being mainly a "sport," though, as we shall see later, an extremely interesting and valuable sport. At one time in the *Bestiary* we find somewhat irregular and broken-down alliteration, not very dissimilar from the non-rhymed parts of Layamon. At another we come upon wandering and uncertainly octosyllabic couplets, fairly constant in their rhymes, but as "wobbling" in point of syllabic constitution as the nearly contemporary examples of the same metre that we find in Germany and Spain. Anon will come a series (evidently inspired by some hymn) of very respectable eights and sixes rhymed in quatrains, and a good deal better than Tate and Brady, but with the same tendency to sevens instead of sixes which we find in the unrhymed *Ormulum*, and which may be accounted for by the still over-inflected state of the language. And yet again the unrhymed couplet of the *Ormulum* itself meets us to show the staggering state of the writer or writers. For even if—which would be rather improbable—the book were a composition from more hands than one, the absence of any prevailing metre would be equally noticeable and equally striking by contrast, especially with the almost tyrannous predominance of the regular octosyllable in all but strictly lyrical work in France at the same time. Most noteworthy of all perhaps is the fact that these quatrains or couplets are mixed, the writer sometimes, it would seem, being unable to hit upon rhyme, though he would if he could.

Nor does the same fruitful source of interest fail in an earlier production of the sacred kind—the so-called *Orison of our Lady*,[1] to which as early a date as 1210 is assigned. This is in couplets and very fairly rhymed, but the lines have not settled down into anything like even length. They range from the fourteeners and fifteeners of the *Ormulum* and the *Moral Ode* to—and this is where the importance of the poem comes in—examples of no less famous a form than the decasyllable itself.[2] It has always been matter of surprise that this famous form, the earliest staple of French, and in one way or another, as decasyllable or hendecasyllable, making its appearance early in the other Romance languages, should have been so late to appear in English. I do not mean that definite decasyllabic couplets can be found in the *Orison*—the writer's grip of his metre, or rather his conception of what he means to grip, is too loose for that. And indeed, though attempts

The *Orison of our Lady*.

[1] Whole in Morris, *Old English Homilies*, i. 191; more than half in *Specimens*.

[2] Cristes | milde | moder | seynte | Marie—
Al is | the heouen | e ful | of thin | e blisse.

of the kind are not uncommon in Hampole, it is extremely doubtful whether they are not merely accidental in all cases before Chaucer—the tendency either to the short octosyllable, the long line halved, or the composite fourteener being apparently irresistible. But that the decasyllable should appear at all (as it does later in Langland's alliteration) is the important thing. There is no simile or metaphor that suits these metrical appearances so well as the old one of the coral island, which first makes uncertain show just awash, with a few points, and in the course of ages establishes itself as a complete and continuous reef or atoll.

The metrical uncertainty of the *Bestiary* and the *Orison* displays itself also in the curious *Proverbs of Alfred*,[1] to which, in their present form, no older date than the middle of the thirteenth century is assigned, but which must be far older in substance, and which may not quite fancifully be connected with the King's *Ephemeris* noticed above. They may be most conveniently taken in comparison with the somewhat later, but not much later, *Proverbs of Hendyng*,[2] attributed to a mythical person of that name, son of the equally mythical "Marcolf," who in scores of different forms holds colloquy with Solomon in mediæval writings. The same familiar saws make their appearance in both with little variation—"A fool's bolt is soon shot," "Spare rod and spoil child," etc. This has of itself a genuine literary interest, because these products of the wisdom of many and the wit of one, thus passing through all English literature, act as tie-rods to maintain its continuity.[3] But the form has interest as well as the matter. The later or Hendyng proverbs are in regular six-lined stanzas of the so-called Romance form, rhymed *aabaab*. In those assigned to Alfred we have over again, but with a distinctly greater tendency toward the predominance of rhyme, the Layamon jumble of regular rhymed or even assonanced couplet, and of equally regular alliterated stave. Some of the sections, each introduced with a "Thus quoth Alfred," are rhymed throughout in couplets of a somewhat staggering dimeter; some show no rhyme at all; and in some it emerges and sinks again after much the same fashion as in the *Bestiary*. In fact, the moral to be drawn from all these poems, even singly but much more together, is that rhyme and metrical equivalence of verse, struggling still at the beginning of the thirteenth century, had by its middle got

Proverbs of Alfred and *Hendyng*.

[1] To be found, like the *Bestiary*, both in *Reliquiae Antiquiae*, i. 170, and in *An Old English Miscellany*, two texts (102, 103 *sq.*). Part again in *Specimens*.

[2] *Rel. Antiq.* i. 109. Extracts will be found in the *second* part of Morris and Skeat's *Specimens*, where the work is dated 1272-1307.

[3] So, I may note in passing, the pet Elizabethan antithesis of "Wit" and "Will" appears at this time in a short piece given by Morris, *Old English Miscellany*, p. 192.

so distinctly the better that everybody turned to rhyme, that most people tried to write pretty regular metrical verse, and that very fair success crowned both attempts. Such success was especially remarkable in the last poem of this period which will claim detailed notice, a poem which is at the same time one of the best.

The Owl and the Nightingale.

This is *The Owl and the Nightingale*,[1] a poem of some 2000 lines in fairly regular octosyllabic couplets, which is attributed to one Nicholas de Guildford, who lived at Portesham in Dorsetshire, and which cannot be much later than the middle of the thirteenth century. The form of it is the very common mediæval one of the *débat*, as it is called in French—a metrical dispute between two persons or things, which may range from a mere exhibition of their several qualities, intended to instruct the reader and show the poet's learning, to a "flyting" of the kind popular much later in Scotland. The general scheme is, of course, a contest and conflict between "crabbed age and youth," between gravity and gaiety, but the Nightingale is the aggressor and the more violent in her language, while the poet seems rather to incline to the side of the Owl. Certainly the Nightingale indulges in the greater personality, and makes on the whole less ingenious use of her case. It is, for instance, a distinct hit of the Owl, when her rival has pleaded that she teaches priests to sing, and increases the joy of man, to retaliate that there are numerous countries where the Nightingale does not go at all, and that she had better make up for this by going and teaching the priests in Ireland and Scotland, in Galloway and Scandinavia, to do their duty. And the bird of Pallas has also a good "flyte" on the moral side (one which she could have justified abundantly from French and Provençal poetry) in her suggestion that the principal effect of the Nightingale's song is to make women false to their husbands, and to get them into various sorts of trouble. This passage contains an allusion which seems to tie the poem down to the reign of Henry III.

On the whole, this is the best example of the octosyllabic couplet to be found before the fourteenth century. The poet (who, by the way, quotes "Alfred" repeatedly, and little else) occasionally commits the fault—specially unpleasing to modern English ears, but natural at his early date, and probably connected with the

[1] I use Wright's ed. for the Percy Society, 1843. The poem (of which there are large pieces in the *Specimens*) was printed earlier (1838) for the Roxburghe Club by Stevenson, and later (1868) at Krefeld by Stratmann, the compiler of the completest M. E. Lexicon. Wright's ed. contains some interesting shorter poems, perhaps by the same author, and these with others (but not the *Owl*) reappear in an *Old English Miscellany*. The best of the latter is a *Love-Rune*, a (religious) Love Song, assigned to Thomas of Halys, and apparently versified from part of the *Ancren Riwle*.

indifference of his French originals to identical rhymes—of making the same rhyme do for two successive couplets; but this does not occur often enough to interfere seriously with harmony. His variations from eights to sevens are not more than the genius of the language specially allows. His style is easy and his poetical imagery and apparatus generally, though comparatively simple, well at command, and by no means of a rude or rudimentary order. We cannot, of course, say that he may not have been directly indebted to a French original, for the theme is one which must almost certainly have tempted the tireless ingenuity of the troubadours and trouvères of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in France and Provence. But we have no direct original, and in such a case it is only fair to credit Nicholas (or whoever he was) with independence. It should be observed that the name occurs in the poem as that of the referee selected by the birds and their audience-arbiter the Wren. He is very handsomely spoken of, and the bishops are reproached because he has only one "wonning"—and tithing, which has made some think that the author cannot have referred to himself. But this argument, which is a sound one at the date and in the circumstances of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, has not much weight in reference to a "finder" of the thirteenth century, at which date and in which class men were by no means wont to be troubled with excessive modesty. Moreover, there is a not impossible touch of humour in the passages relating to "Maister Nichole"—

> Through [whose] mouth and through [whose] hand
> It is the better into Scotland!

It should be remarked also, before concluding, that in this poem, as in all others of the time, the language is by no means freely gallicised.

At no long time in front of this period romances must have begun to be written in English, and three of not the least interesting that we have, *Havelok*, *Horn*, and *Sir Tristrem*, are allowed even by jealous literary chronologists to be probably older than the year 1300. But the advantage of treating the Anglo-French romance together is so great and obvious, that it will be better to relegate these to a future chapter.[1]

[1] The *fabliau* of *Dame Siriz* (Wright's *Anecdota Literaria*, 1844), *The Vox* [Fox] *and the Wolf* (*Reliquiae Antiquae*, ii. 272-8), an interesting and Early English version of *Reynard*, and others, might be added. The *Christabel* variation occurs in these also; but *Genesis and Exodus* appears to be much the earliest and most considerable example thereof.

CHAPTER III

SECOND MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD

1300–1360

Robert of Gloucester—Robert Manning—Lyrics—The *Ayenbite of Inwyt*—The Northern Psalter—Manning—William of Shoreham—The *Cursor Mundi*—Hampole—Adam Davy—Laurence Minot—*Cleanness* and *Patience*—*The Pearl.*

THE latter part of the thirteenth century is not a very fruitful period of English literature—so far at least as attributions that can be called in any way certain, or even probable, are concerned. We have glanced at possible romances. Of other work we have, dating from the extreme end of the thirteenth century and the earlier half of the fourteenth, a very considerable body of theological literature of the old kind, exhibiting characteristics frequently of linguistic and occasionally of literary interest; at least one named and known writer of such literature, Richard Rolle of Hampole, who, though his importance has, as usual, been exaggerated, is of some mark; at least one individual religious poem, the *Cursor Mundi*, which, though its authorship is unknown, is remarkable not merely for size; two most interesting and important new developments—the verse-history of more or less contemporary events, and the accomplished lyric in the new prosody; and (to mention only work of distinction) at the extreme close of the period, or a little beyond it, a group of companions of very remarkable poetical merit, which have been thought to be of common authorship, the *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*, to which some would add the very attractive alliterative romance of *Gawain and the Greene Knight*. This latter will be most conveniently dealt with later, the others had best be handled here. All four pieces were at any rate connected with a very curious literary phenomenon, the resurrection of alliterative verse, which had some good consequences, and but for Chaucer might have had many more bad ones.

The earliest of these works, or group of works, in point of time, and not the least interesting in literary history, if not of the first intrinsic literary merit, is the batch of verse-histories, of which Robert of Gloucester's is the oldest. This is dated about two years before the close of the thirteenth century, while Robert Manning, or Robert of Brunne, comes some thirty years later.

Robert of Gloucester[1] is a very interesting person, and a much better poet than it has been the fashion to represent him, though his first object was not poetry, and though, had it been so, he was but ill equipped. It is not known when he was born, but he did not write, or finish writing, till quite the close of the thirteenth century, though he had personal remembrance of the civil wars in the latter part of Henry III.'s reign, and carried his own chronicle to the year 1272. He was not superior to the odd craze which induced most of the historians of this time to begin with the Siege of Troy, and he abstracts Geoffrey of Monmouth for a considerable part of his book with that docility which, though it may seem singular in the transferred sense of the word, was universal as far as almost all his contemporaries were concerned. With Anglo-Saxon history he deals slightly, and despite his ardent English patriotism—his book opens with a vigorous panegyric of England, the first of a series extending to the present day (from which an anthology *De Laudibus Angliae* might be made)—he deals very harshly with Harold Godwinson. From the Conquest onward he does his best to draw on French, Latin, and English sources alike, reinforcing them in the later years with personal recollections or reminiscences, as in the case of the Oxford town-and-gown row of 1263.

Robert of Gloucester.

Although, however, Robert is in many places agreeable to read for the story and for his spirited temper, yet the main interest in him for the literary historian is still connected with his form and vehicle. This is the long swinging verse, half-trochaic, half-anapæstic, which we have already watched in its development, as the new metrical prosody beat it out of the ancient alliterated and unmetrical stave, and which was to be ever improved and suppled from this date to that of Mr. Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung*. This line may be said to have two normal varieties, towards which it unconsciously directs itself. Of one of these, Robert's first line, hardly altered—

Enge | land is a | right good | land, I | ween of all | lands the | best—

is a very fair average example, and the poet not unfrequently equals it. But he has also some inclination towards the other form, which

[1] First printed by Hearne, with Manning, etc., in 1724. I use the 1810 reprint (4 vols.) of these.

in its perfection is simply the iambic fourteener so much spoken of in the last chapter—

By her | he had | a daugh | ter sweet | the goo | dỳ queen | ỳ Maud |

But, as might be expected, he not merely oscillates between these two cadences, but frequently rolls or staggers into others—sometimes considerably less musical; while he is by no means free from the tendency to cut the line so short that with a slight change in pronunciation it would become neither more nor less than a decasyllable, as in—

And took | him hos | tage good | at his | own will |

where no doubt the contemporary value of some words would disguise the length. Nor is this the only possibility which his uncertain movement develops, for again elsewhere we have approaches to the pure anapæstic tetrameter, also to become a favourite metre later—

An house | of reli | gion of ca | nons ywis |

though in the same manner here the full syllabic value of "religion" would obscure for the time the cadence. The point has, however, been dwelt upon here because it is an interesting help towards the comprehension of the manner in which *all* the stock English metres resulted from the clash of the strict French syllabic prosody, of the Latin syllabic equivalence, and of the Anglo-Saxon tolerance of extra-metrical, or rather extra-rhythmical syllables. That the French decasyllable itself helped the English analogue to emerge is perfectly true, but there is no need to regard the latter as a foreign importation.

The peculiarity of this metre (which, though its ancestor, is still not by any means the same as our hymn common measure, a strict iambic metre without trisyllabic liberties, and never shifting the foot to trochaic rhythm) is very closely reproduced in a large body of Lives of the Saints of about the same period, which accordingly good authorities have regarded as being also the work of Robert of Gloucester. Mr. W. H. Black, who edited one of them, that dealing with Becket, more than fifty years ago,[1] was very positive on the subject, and the latest authorities [2] seem to have no objection. The beautiful Celtic legend of *St. Brandan* [3] has also been edited from this collection, as well as others. It must, of course, be obvious that the

[1] Percy Society, 1845. [2] Morris and Skeat (*Specimens*, ii. 1) reprint selections from the *Chronicle* and the *Life of St. Dunstan* as Robert's.

[3] Ed. Wright, Percy Society, 1844. All, from Laud MS., E. E. T. S., ed. Horstmann, who has also given collections of Saints' Lives — *Alt-Englische Legenden*—Paderborn, 1875; Heilbronn, 1878 and 1881.

adoption of the form for things so popular as Saints' Lives both testifies to its own popularity and would help to confirm and spread this. And it is perhaps not rash to add that there are points in it which would rather encourage the relapse on alliteration which we shall have to notice at the end of this chapter. In the first place, the extreme looseness of the verse—almost the most mobile of all English forms—tends that way; and in the second the great distance of the rhyme-safeguards from each other makes them more likely to be overpowered, if not overlooked.

From this same point of view the interest of Robert's forty years later successor, Robert Manning, is well sustained, though in other respects it falls short. This second Robert, whom we shall meet again in this chapter, was a Gilbertine canon, and derived his surname from the place of his birth, Brunne or Bourn in Lincolnshire. The authorities are generous to him in the matter of life, supposing that it may have extended from about 1260 to about 1340, or even later; but this is mere guesswork. It seems that his history was not finished till 1338. Unlike Robert of Gloucester's, it was a translation, or rather, as all mediæval translations are, an adaptation, of a single work, the chronicle written in French, but by an Englishman, Peter Langtoft, canon of Bridlington, with amplifications from Wace and other sources. Historically he has not much importance, nor can his work be said to equal the other Robert's in direct literary attraction.[1] But for the study of the history of English metre it is very valuable. Langtoft had written in the ordinary measure of the later *chansons de geste*, monorhymed *laisses* of twelve-syllabled lines, and Manning was clearly under the impression that he must get as near to this as he could. In his prefatory remarks he employs the regular octosyllabic couplet, the earliest of all our metres; but this would not have done for the body of the work. He accordingly, having none of his namesake's swing, contented himself with a very prosaic line, which at its best is the fourteener, at its worst an indefinite number of syllables which some might call a "verse of four accents" because of its rebelliousness to any more accomplished arrangement.

Robert Manning.

It was about rhyme, however, that Robert Manning seems to have been most careful and troubled. Sometimes he is content to let these shambling lines of his rhyme in couplets. But ever and anon his conscience seems to prick him, and he either adds middle rhyme or attempts the, in English almost hopeless, task of emulating the continued rhymes of his original. Of these he achieves sometimes

[1] It ought to be said that important authorities, Sir Frederic Madden and Dr. Furnivall, have thought better of Manning's poetical power, but chiefly, I think, as shown in *Handlyng Synne*.

as many as a score, but always with a result equally cacophonous and lame.

To those, however, who are not satisfied with merely formal interest, the next division to which we come will have far greater attraction, while to those who can appreciate both form and spirit it will have altogether exceptional charm. This division consists of the first blossoming of English lyric properly so called. The famous *Sumer is icumen in*, the Cuckoo-Song long ago printed by Sir John Hawkins, and made popular by Ellis in his *Specimens* for more than a century past, has generally had, as observed above, the credit assigned to it of being the actually oldest piece of the kind, and though such attributions are always rather temerarious, there is no need to disturb this particular one if the date is not carried back too far. The poem is in very short lines and of a simple and almost rude structure, besides being more noticeable for its fresh and genuine observation of nature than for any very poetical spirit. Rhyme is quite established in it, but it may easily be of the thirteenth century, and perhaps as early as its middle. It is not, however, till the close thereof that we get any considerable collection of lyrics of great merit on profane subjects.[1] This is the collection taken from the MS. known as 2253 Harl., preserved in the British Museum. Its prettiest piece, *Alison*, was also printed by Ellis, whose taste in these matters, though just a little touched with eighteenth-century Voltairianism, was excellent; but the whole collection did not appear till Thomas Wright, that benefactor of our literature, printed it for the Percy Society on 1st March 1842, a particularity of date which may be pardoned in consideration of the exceptional charm of the work and of its importance in English literary history. For though there must have been other poems of the kind written, and though we actually have a few, they have not been collected as they should have been into a *corpus*, and the total does not appear to be very large.

Lyrics.

It is obvious, though it is not the less important for its obviousness, that these poems, like all the lyrical work of Europe during the thirteenth century, were composed not in slavish imitation, but in generous yet none the less distinct following, of the troubadours of Provence and the trouvères of Northern France.[2] In the course probably of the twelfth century, certainly by its end, these poets had

[1] The shorter poems mentioned in the last chapter (p. 60, note) must not be forgotten, but they are almost entirely sacred. At the same time, as the maiden asked the author of *A Love Rune* for an actual love-song, love-songs must have been written.

[2] The *direct* influence of Provence was probably very small. But it has been sometimes assumed on the strength of the marriage of Henry III.

almost exhausted the possible combinations of lyric so far as strictly syllabic prosody went, and within the limitations of dissyllabic feet which the structure of both languages imposed. There are vestiges of trisyllabic arrangement in Northern French, but they disappear early. The English minstrel and the German minnesinger took these models and adapted them, but in each case gave more or less scope to the irrepressible craving of Teutonic lips and ears for the triple movement.

This Romance influence is plainly evidenced in the collection before us by the very fact of its being bilingual. Of the forty-two pieces printed by Wright, the three first and others later are in French. But the fourth, beginning

Middelerd for mon is made,

is in English, and at once introduces us to a complete and distinctly elaborate lyrical arrangement. There is still, as in almost all Middle English poetry—even in Chaucer himself—a great deal of alliteration, but it has no influence on the actual form. This consists of an eleven-line stanza, which proceeds as far as the octave in regular "eights," admitting catalexis, rhymed *ababababab*, and completes itself with a six, eight, six *coda* or "bob" rhymed *cbc*. The next has ten-lined stanzas monorhymed in the octave, which consists of heavily alliterated "four-accent" doggerel tipped with a decasyllabic couplet differently rhymed, and approaching more closely to a regular decasyllable. This is not a good piece, but the next, the *Alison*, which is, or ought to be, as famous as *Sumer is icumen in*, is quite delightful—the first perfectly delightful thing in English poetry. The lovely intertwined music of its twelve-lined stanzas, composed of an eight and six quatrain, an eight triplet, a six, another eight triplet, and another six, rhymed *ababbbbcdddc*, is not too good for the simple but fervid passion and the charming imagery of the piece. It is no exaggeration to say that the promise of Donne and Herrick, of Burns and Shelley, is in *Alison*.

A careful study of the various metres of these poems will show that, in spite of occasional lapses from strict metrical propriety, there was practically no secret of English prosody which was not at least ready to be unlocked for English poets. Even their greatest license, the shrinkage of the octosyllable to seven or even six, which is so freely allowed, had this of merit in it, that it served as an additional safeguard against the cast-iron syllabic uniformity of their Romance models, which would have fatally hampered the varied music of English. There is as yet less tendency to extend, and the influence of the same models as yet checks anapæstic movement. But even

this appears, and it was certain to be encouraged by that beneficent process of regular dropping of inflections, and the final *è* in particular, which went on without cessation till the fifteenth century. When one man gave a word the value of three syllables and another that of two, it was practically impossible that an absolute mould like that of a Latin Alcaic, or a French scheme of any sort, should be adopted. Nor is the fact that in these poems we occasionally find polyglot French or Latin lines in alternation with English to be regarded as a matter of little consequence. For it cannot be too often repeated that what English wanted now was exactly that "madman to mix it" who, according to the proverb (of Spanish origin, I think), is required to make a good salad. The three tongues, with their different cadences, their different structure, their different prosodic ideals, could not be shaken up against each other too much in order to produce that matchless blend the English poetic language, with its unequalled combination of freedom and order, and its inexhaustible resources of varied melody.

The most noticeable metre, though not the best, that emerges from this pleasant welter of experiment is that romance sestet or *rime couée* (its old French name), which, as we shall see in the next chapter, by degrees rivalled, and again by other degrees even outdid, the regular octosyllabic couplet as the favourite vehicle of narrative poetry. Its great drawback, the danger of a sing-song monotony, which Chaucer brought out in the memorable but rather unfair burlesque of *Sir Thopas*, appears at once. But English literature owes it a distinct debt. If it is more exposed to this danger, it is less exposed to that of undistinguished fluency than the couplet, the "ungirt" character of which did much harm to French poetry and (till Chaucer showed how it might be strengthened and varied) to English. And it provided what was now specially wanted, a go-cart of fairly accomplished but not in the least difficult metrical stanza in which the growing language could practise itself. The earlier stages of no literature can be properly understood unless this function of exercise is apprehended. And such stages have the immense and untiring attraction of future, of promise, joined to that, more delicate but even more poignant, of antiquity and of the past.[1]

Although, as has been pointed out, the sacred division of this literature forms much the larger part in bulk, it is, for reasons already also indicated, of less literary importance than the profane. Linguistically, however, it helps very largely to build the bridge over what would be otherwise in most cases the unbridged gulf between the

[1] Four of the best of these pieces, including *Alison* and the only less charming *Lenten is come with love to town*, will be found in Morris and Skeat's *Specimens*.

Anglo-Saxon of the eleventh century and the accomplished Middle English of the fourteenth; and in so far as it is in verse, it supplies many useful links and tell-tales in that surpassingly interesting examination of prosodic change which, as has been said, really constitutes, for literature, the chief attraction of this period in English.

Of this attraction the prose part of this division of literature is necessarily divested, and its principal monument, the *Ayenbite of Inwyt*[1] of Dan Michel of Northgate (a translation from the same treatise, the *Somme des Vices et des Vertus* of a French monk named Laurence, which afterwards served as the stuff of Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*), is, with some sermons by the same author, of little or no interest as literature. Indeed it is almost the worst possible even of translations, executed with no intelligence, and simply beaten out, word for often mistaken word. Its quaint Kentish dialect, far more uncouth than that of much earlier work, and surprisingly so when we remember that it was probably written as late as the year (1340) of Chaucer's probable birth, constitutes an attraction for the philologist. With its *z*'s for *s*'s and other peculiarities, it suggests the original of the kind of composite *patois*, now chiefly suggesting to us that of the extreme south-west, which we find in Shakespeare and in other literary English up to the present century. Nor is the contemporary Northern prose ascribed to Hampole or his disciples (of whom more *infra*) without a certain interest of curiosity, while it is distinctly less archaic and more literary than the *Ayenbite*. But in strictness there is no English prose that really deserves much attention from the literary point of view until the latter half of the fourteenth century. "Let the *Ancren Riwle* be saved alone by its flavour," as Saint-Evremond says of the snipe among brown meats.

The *Ayenbite of Inwyt*.

With verse—still, as always in the Middle Ages, the maid-of-all-work of literature—the case is different. The verse Homilies and Lives of Saints steadily continue, and furnish us from time to time with fresh examples of the manner in which the ordinary versifier handled his tools. Of much greater interest is a certain Metrical Version of the Psalms[2] in Yorkshire or Northumbrian dialect, which is sometimes stated to be of the thirteenth century, but which the devotees of Hampole assign to their favourite, in which case it would

[1] Ed. Morris, E.E.T.S. The eccentric-looking title only requires a minute's consideration to explain itself as the "again-biting" (="re-morse," cf. Pecock's vocabulary in Book iv. *infra*) of inner wit (=conscience).

[2] First published by the Surtees Society in 1843; to be found in vol. ii. pp. 129-273, of Dr. Horstmann's great Hampolian Miscellany, London, 1896. Some examples in *Specimens*.

be thirty or forty years younger at least. The present writer has no pretensions to decide on linguistic grounds, and is not of the Hampole fanatics. But the metrical arrangement of the Psalter certainly seems to favour rather the later than the earlier date, and in any case to argue a writer distinctly above the common in literary and poetical gifts. The metre is the octosyllable, seldom or never shortened to less than sevens, but often extended into that form which I have taken to be the probable original of the heroic couplet. The slight harshness (not going beyond an agreeable astringency) of the Northern dialect is compatible with, and here attains, a considerable dignity; the feeble fluency which is the curse of the octosyllabic couplet seldom or never appears; the expletives which are almost a greater curse not merely of the couplet but of stanza-writing at this time, and from which even Chaucer did not entirely free himself, are mainly absent; and the phrase and arrangement possess that grave stateliness which is so suitable to religious poetry, and which, except in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it has too often lacked.

The Northern Psalter.

There is not so much dignity, though there is rather more freedom and engagingness, in the *Handling Sin*[1] of Robert Manning, already mentioned as a historian. There is much significance for literary history in the fact that this, like Manning's secular work, was a translation from the French work of an English predecessor, in this case the *Manuel des Péchés* of William of Waddington. This work, containing, after homiletic fashion, stories of the pious *fabliau* kind, gave some practice in tale-telling, and is not unimportant among the ancestry of Chaucer. Contemporary with Manning, but in the South not the North, was another named writer of religious verse, William of Shoreham (the Kentish not the Sussex Shoreham), who lived and wrote in the first quarter of the fourteenth century at Leeds and Chart Sutton, in the district between Maidstone and Canterbury. Shoreham[2] dealt in verse with the Sacraments, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Ten Commandments, the service of Our Lady, and even the higher questions of theology, such as immortality and the existence of God. The curious thing—though it would not have seemed curious to anybody then—is the selection of lyric metres for such subjects. Thus, for instance, the *Poem on Baptism*, which is the most easily accessible of his works, being given in Morris and Skeat's *Selections*, is couched in a seven-line stanza, rhymed *xaxabxb*, in which *x* stands for unrhymed lines of *ad libitum* ending. And the unsuitableness of the form to modern eyes and ears is completed by

Manning.

William of Shoreham.

[1] Ed. Furnivall for the Roxburghe Club, 1862; for the E.E.T.S. 1901, *sq.*

[2] Ed. Wright for the Percy Society, 1849.

the fact that while the first quatrain is of *Ormulum* eights and sevens, and the last couplet of the same, the fifth line is a "bob" or short catch of two or three syllables only. But there was nothing incongruous in this then to the reader or hearer, while the invincible patience of the mediæval *scriptorium* made it no doubt easy enough to the writer.[1]

We have, as has been said, for this time a fair supply of verse homilies, usually in octosyllables; but by far the most interesting verse divinity of the period is contained in the huge poem or collection called the *Cursor Mundi*.[2]

The *Cursor Mundi*.

This enormous, but by no means tedious, production has been put at the service of every reader by the more than mediæval diligence of the late Dr. Morris, in four parallel texts exhibiting different forms of dialect and substance, with appendices containing parts of others. The longest version just falls short of 30,000 lines, and the total in all forms cannot be much below five times this amount.

The poem, however, is of real interest and value. The author, who writes in octosyllabic couplets of considerable ease and spirit, begins by acknowledging the general desire for rhymes and romances of Alexander, of Troy, of Arthur, of Sir Isumbras and Sir Amadas, and of Charlemagne, most of which deal with earthly love. But earthly love fails, the love of Our Lady (in whose honour he writes his book) dies not. He intends to tell the whole of the Bible history—

> Into Inglis tong to rede,
> For the love of Inglis lede (people)—

and he does so.

But the way in which he does it is the true mediæval divagation. Not merely does he dilate on such incidents as please him with perfect freedom; not merely does he comment on them in the homiletic manner, letting the narrative stand still, but in the arbitrary, uncritical, to us now inconceivable, but always charming, fashion of the time, he incorporates with the Scriptural narrative itself any fragments of hagiology, any traditional stories—sometimes of a more or less mundane character—and any, it may be, inventions of his own, that come into his head. The fall of the angels, the Creation, the loss of Paradise are expanded with rather less than the amplifications usual in these cases, until we come to that delightful legend, the Story of the Three Trees, which plays such an important

[1] The Athanasian Creed may be found paraphrased in sixains of eights and fours at p. 139 of Wright's edition.

[2] Ed. Morris (E.E.T.S.), in seven parts.

part in the earlier stages of the Arthurian cycle. Afterwards, we pass few of the Biblical data without finding them enriched by fresh details, as that Lamech's daughter Noema was the first "webster," and that man became carnivorous after the Deluge only, because the earth had so much of the goodness washed out of it by the water that its fruit was not strong enough to support man, whose own constitution was likewise debilitated.

Among the pains least lost upon this interesting book, those spent upon the classification of its materials may perhaps be counted. Much seems to have been taken from the History of Petrus Comestor in the twelfth century, something from poems of Wace, who, as we have seen, was much in the hands of English writers, together with a good deal from Grostête's *Castle of Love*, the apocryphal Gospels of Matthew and Nicodemus, and the works of Isidore of Seville. The fact is that, at first or second hand, the books at the disposal of an ordinary mediæval writer were pretty constant; and the frequent reappearance of the same or similar legends is not at all difficult to account for.

The important thing, however, in this as in all cases, is not the information which was at a writer's disposal, but the use he makes of it. The author of the *Cursor Mundi*—

> The best book of all,
> "The Course of the World" men do it call—

(as one enthusiastic copyist prefaces it)—knew very well indeed how to use his materials. Long as the book is, and familiar as is the main substance, if not the occasional settings-off, it can be read with ease and pleasure from beginning to end by any one who has time, and can be dipped into with satisfaction by those who have not. The Cotton version is perhaps, on the whole, the best to read, though there is not very much difference. The satisfaction comes from the easy but not at all slipshod way in which the writer manages his metre, the simple but by no means contemptible art with which he mixes and varies his materials, and the shrewd but kindly sense of his comments and observations. In speaking of the destruction of the Cities of the Plain—a subject generally exciting to mediæval imagination—he cannot rise to the indignant passion of the later poem called *Cleanness* (*vide infra*), but he acquits himself very well, and never falls into the falsetto of moral indignation. The "Three Trees" story above referred to is told very effectively; and the Life of Christ, varied and heightened as it is by the additions from apocryphal story, makes a religious romance of high merit. He is proverbial without being over-sententious, good in description with-

out descending to too much detail (an excellence rare in mediæval times, perhaps not common in any); he has throughout his immense narrative a distinct sense of proportion. It is really a pity that we do not know his name, for if not exactly a great man or a genius, he must certainly have been a person of no ordinary ability.

Yet in the ignorance of the name of an author there is a certain consolation, inasmuch as he is less likely to be made the theme of uncritical criticism. This latter has been the lot of the one named author of importance who falls to be noticed in this chapter, Richard Rolle of Hampole, the author certainly of the *Stimulus Conscientiae* or *Prick of Conscience*, the author, more or less probably, of a considerable number of other works both in Latin and English, and the reputed author of many more still. Rolle is the first Middle English author of whom we have anything approaching to a full biographical account (we have even a portrait of him which may be authentic), and his history as told by himself is certainly not uninteresting. He must have been born about the meeting of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, at Thornton, in the North Riding of Yorkshire, not far from Pickering; his death is set by the author of his *Vita*, with more exactness, at 29th September 1349. It will have been observed from one or two scattered notices already, that the literary effacement of the North, which had been begun by the Danish fury in the ninth century, and had been renewed by the devastations of the Conqueror and the Scottish wars in the eleventh and twelfth, had shown signs of ceasing, and Richard Rolle seems to have had every advantage of education. His father, William, was a friend of Sir John Dalton, and may have been connected with the great family of Neville. At any rate Richard, after some home instruction, was sent to Oxford by Thomas Neville, Archdeacon of Durham. In the second decade of the fourteenth century there were no colleges but Merton, Balliol, Exeter, and University, nor does there seem to be any record of Rolle's connection with any of these. But the University itself was at the height of its vogue: halls and hostels were innumerable. Richard appears to have become fairly competent in the scholastic philosophy which was the chief study of the place, but, like other devotional mystics, to have mistrusted merely intellectual teaching, and is said to have left Oxford and returned to Yorkshire in his nineteenth year, determined to adopt the life of a hermit, *not* "unholy of works," as Langland was to put it a generation later. The way in which, still to borrow from his successor, he "shope him a shroud" was slightly grotesque, for he borrowed two of his sister's gowns, a grey and a white one, cut off the grey sleeves, then put on the white gown first and the grey over it, completed his uniform with one of his

Hampole.

father's hoods (black, it may be presumed), and ran away. It is not surprising to hear that his injured sister thought him mad and cried out that he was so. He had known the young Daltons at Oxford, and this or some other reason induced him to make for their father's estate, supposed to be near Thirsk (an easy day's journey from Pickering), where he appeared at church and entered the Daltons' pew. He was recognised, and allowed first to sing, then to preach—an illustration of the easygoing ways of that mediæval Christianity which has been represented by and to the ignorant as a tyrannical and hidebound system of ceremonial. After he had been for a time an almost unwilling guest of the Daltons, the father gave him a cell, an allowance, and, with the proper dress, the recognised status of a hermit.

These details have been given because, with the exception of the Cædmon story, they are almost the first fragments of literary biography in English. The accounts of the remainder of Richard's life are less picturesque. He remained for some years in the hermitage which Sir John Dalton had given him, attaining at last complete "conversion," and it would appear converting others, sometimes travelling to do so. From the Thirsk hermitage he seems to have transferred himself to one in the Richmondshire district of his native Riding. We hear something of his friends here, especially an anchoress named Margaret Kirkby. But at last he made another move to Hampole, near Doncaster, in the extreme south of the county, and abode there for the rest of his life in the neighbourhood of a Cistercian nunnery, where he seems to have had disciples. He may have died of the first outbreak of the Black Death, which coincided with the date above given, and his sepulchre, which was carefully tended by the nuns, became famous for miracles.

The works of Hampole[1] are, as has been said, both Latin and English. The former do not directly concern us, but it is noticeable that the alliteration of which we shall presently hear so much is very obvious in them as well as in the English. They also contain perhaps the clearest exhibitions of his religious opinions. These centred round that mystical clinging to Divine Love which was the frequent, and no doubt the natural, reaction from the intense but hard intellectuality of scholasticism. Although Hampole has all the mediæval terror of the "soft mystery" of woman's love, though he cannot reach the noble directness and passionate sanity of the author of *Cleanness*, he had an odd aversion to "rules," to the regular

[1] The *Prick of Conscience* was edited by Morris for the Philological Society (1863). The E.E.T.S. added some *English Prose Treatises* (ed. Perry). Dr. Horstmann's Hampolian Thesaurus above referred to is entitled *Yorkshire Writers*, 2 vols. London, 1895-96.

monkish institutions, which explains, or at any rate is a very early symptom of, the deterioration of monachism apparent in England.

His principles also appear in his English works, but it is not with his principles that we are here concerned. The study of him would have been facilitated if his latest, most extensive, and most enthusiastic editor, Dr. Horstmann, had indulged his readers with the usual compliment of a table of contents, the absence of which is at all times troublesome, but positively bewildering in the case of a thousand large pages of small print, arranged, as far as the verse is concerned, in double columns, and consisting of scores and hundreds of separate pieces of all lengths. This edition, moreover, does not contain the *Prick of Conscience*, Hampole's chief work. This is a poem containing nearly 10,000 lines, dealing with the Life of Man, its uncertainty, and the Four Last Things. The matter has a sort of shuddering intensity which is very noticeable, and which sometimes gives direct picturesque force. The form is the octosyllabic couplet with distinct trisyllabic admixture in the *Christabel* direction. It has been pointed out already that this scheme constantly tends towards something that may be indifferently scanned as a "four-accent" verse with trisyllabic sections and a heroic of five iambs. Such things, *e.g.*—

> The b(o)ugh | es are | the ar | mes with | the handes
> And the | legges | with the | fete | that standes |

are, or are like, heroic couplets, and accordingly it has not been very unusual to claim for Hampole the use, or even by a singular want of understanding of the facts the invention, of the metre before Chaucer. This is uncritical, if *deliberate* use is meant.

His prose treatises contain nothing very remarkable as literature, though they may, with care, be taken as further stages in the chain which leads from the *Ancren Riwle* to Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*. But his minor poems, if they be his, have much more merit, and excel in this respect the *Prick of Conscience* itself. They are all sacred; but they show that the "soft mystery" of human love was not absent from, and indeed had probably, for ill or good, inspired Hampole's Love Divine. To say, as a too ardent editor has said, that their beauty and melody have never been surpassed, is unlucky; this is the kind of thing which brings discredit upon literary history and hopelessly mars its usefulness. But

> Unkinde man, give kepe til me,

and

> Lo leman sweet, now may thou see,

have the "unction" of our most successful hymn-writers, and certainly the poem beginning—

> My treuest treasure so traitorly taken,
> So bitterly bounden with bytand band(e)s,
> How soon of thy servants wast thou forsaken,
> And loathly for my life hurled with their hand(e)s !

has a rhythm which is no common one, and which curiously reminds us of another Northumbrian poet 500 years later than Hampole—that is to say, of Mr. Swinburne.[1]

Nor can any one of these canticles of Divine Love, according to Richard Hampole, be spoken of otherwise than with admiration, while of the remaining pieces of verse attributed to him most have a certain individuality of form or spirit or both. But for the attribution to him of the revival of strictly alliterative verse there is little if any more warrant than for the ascription to him of the invention of the heroic. We can at the most (and also at the least) allow that this revival was a very reasonable consequence of the increased stimulus to literary composition in the North—always fonder of alliterative rhythm, and more rebel to strict metrical ways, than the South—of which he certainly was one of the lights and leaders.

Two other named writers, one a little earlier, one a little later than Hampole, have obtained representation in English literary history, though they are decidedly less interesting, even when we take the hermit who robbed his sister of her gowns somewhat less seriously than he has sometimes been taken. The first of these,

Adam Davy.

Adam Davy, occupied the rather mysterious office of "Marshal of Stratford-atte-Bowe" about the year 1312, and no doubt spoke good French of the local pattern to the persons whom he marshalled. He happened, while many worthier writers escaped it, to attract the attention of Warton, who not merely attributed to him divers sacred poems found in the same manuscript, but also the excellent romance of *Alexander*, which is probably earlier, and certainly by a much better writer. Davy's undoubted work consists of *Visions of Edward II.*, which have been re-edited for the Early English Text Society by Dr. Furnivall.

Laurence Minot had a likelier subject than Adam Davy, inasmuch

[1] Swallow my sister, O sister swallow,
How can thy heart be full of the spring?
Itylus.

and the great stanza of the *Triumph of Time*. The final *es* of Hampole's alternate lines would soon have dropped. There is no other weak ending. Cf. also the pretty lines of Eve in the second Coventry Play, "Alas ! that ever the speech was spoken."

as he celebrated not Edward II., but Edward III. in his earlier glories. His subsequent fortune has been correspondent, for he has had the honour, most unusual for a Middle English poet even of higher rank than himself, of being four times edited, and five times printed in full—by Ritson in 1795 and 1825, by Mr. Wright in his Record Office *Political Poems*, by Dr. Scholle in a German periodical, and by Mr. Joseph Hall for the Clarendon Press. The fact is the best possible evidence of the superiority of subject to form as means of gaining general attention. Minot, who wrote in 1352, who seems to have been a Northerner from his dialect, but of whom we know nothing more, is a fair, but no more than a fair, specimen of the English trouvère-of-all-work of the period. His subjects are: Halidon Hill; the capture of Berwick, which he takes as an avenging of Bannockburn; the entry of Edward, our comely king, into Brabant; the battle in the Swin; the leaguer at Tournay; the march to Calais; Crecy and the battle there; the siege of Calais; Neville's Cross; the sea-fight with the Spaniards; and the taking of Guines.

Laurence Minot.

The forms of the poems that compose this cycle of the deeds of Edward—for that is what, with all its formal variety, it comes to—are various. Halidon is told in octave eights admitting catalexis, rhymed alternately with a title couplet which is found in all the poems and a final quatrain. The Berwick sack is in sixains rhymed *aaaabb*, the lines hovering between anapæstic fours and iambic fives as so often noted; the entry into Brabant in octosyllabic couplets followed by romance sixains 886886 rhymed *aabaab;* the Battle of the Swin or Sluys in the above hovering couplets; Tournay in octaves of sixes, to the three last of which "bobs" and couplets are added, making the *Tristrem* stanza (*vide infra*); Crecy in octaves like Halidon with a couplet prologue; Calais in similar staves without prologue; Neville s Cross in long sixteen-lined stanzas of very short lines, which perhaps should be octaves of longer lines; the Spaniards in twelves of the same kind, and the Castle of Guines in the same.

These poems have historical and patriotic interest[1] in no small degree; but for literature their chief value is perhaps the way in

[1] Their patriotism, as is not unnatural or uncommon, becomes a little abusive now and then. It may perhaps be usefully observed in connection with them that the employment of the vernacular for political satire, etc., is a sure gauge of its literary standing. In Wright's first collection of *Political Songs* for the Camden Society in 1839—a collection extending from the reign of John to that of Edward II.—not one of the four pieces for John's reign is English, only one of the fifteen for Henry III.'s, but nearly *half* (eight out of seventeen) of those for the Edwards. In his later and much larger collection from Edward III. to Richard III. for the "Rolls Series" (2 vols. 1859-1861) any language save English becomes more and more the exception.

which they show that a fairly sufficient and satisfactory medium, a ready-made poetic diction and cadence, was now at last at the disposal of the verse-writer. There is nothing in Minot's poems, though some have spirit, especially the Neville's Cross piece, and that on the naval victory over the Spaniards, with its apostrophe to the

Boy with the black beard !

that can be said to show any very special or peculiar poetical talents in the author. He is given to expletives, he seldom or never succeeds in giving us a distinct visual picture; his very variety of metre, etc., looks more like the absence of any distinct grasp and command of one form than like a sense of general mastery. But, as has hardly been the case for three hundred years and more, he has a fairly settled tongue and a generally accepted prosody, with its peculiarities of lilt and swing all ready to his hands; and he manages to make very tolerably good use of them. Indeed, though it may seem rather ungracious, it is not impossible to say that his chief use in literature proper is that he *explains* Chaucer—shows how the tools were ready for the workman.

Last in this chapter falls to be noticed a very remarkable group of poems, which, with another reserved for the Romance division, have been attributed to a single author by their editors, who have also in some cases indulged in much hypothesis as to that author's identity. As in all cases, the reader is here simply referred to the discussions in question on the latter point. As to the former, I should be disposed to admit as extremely probable the common authorship of *Patience*, *Cleanness*, and *The Pearl*.[1] *Gawain and the Green Knight* (*vide* chap. v.) seems to me to be much more dubiously their brother; for the fact of their being found in the same MS. is really no argument at all, considering the almost invariable mediæval habit of transcribing, straight on, the most heterogeneous and unconnected work. And it is also very possible to allow too much weight to the alleged linguistic resemblances. But it is not impossible that the four poems may have had a common writer, and it is certain that all are much above the average in merit.

Cleanness and *Patience*.

In the three that are to be noticed in this place, the alliterative reaction, which has been already referred to, shows itself (as it does also in the *Green Knight*) very strongly, though in differing measure and degree. *Cleanness* and *Patience*, two poems, the first of rather over 1800 lines, the other of rather over 500, each of

[1] *Early English Alliterative Poems*, ed. Morris (E.E.T.S.), [*The*] *Pearl* separately edited by I. Gollancz, London, 1891.

which begins with the title-word, are written in alliterative blank verse, observing for the most part the old rule of two alliterations in the first section and one in the second, very closely though not rigidly equivalent in syllabic length, precise in the middle pause, and though not metrical, yet exhibiting a general set of rhythm towards anapæstic cadence in the first half, and trochaic in the second. This, in fact, was the general scheme of the new alliteration at its best time, as here and in Langland. Later, especially in Dunbar and Douglas, the alliteration is exaggerated, and the lines lengthened accordingly. *The Pearl*, on the other hand, though very strongly alliterated, does not depend on alliteration for its system of scansion, but is in twelve-lined octosyllabic stanzas rhymed *ababababbcbc*, these stanzas being further grouped in divisions generally of five each, the last line of each stanza in the group being a sort of refrain, which is more or less repeated throughout. The characteristics of matter and spirit are more uniform. All three poems are pervaded by a singular and very impressive mixture of devotional feeling, with poetical appreciation of things mundane as well, and by a solemn melody rare in earlier verse. In *Cleanness* the mediæval worship of purity, enforced by vigorous paraphrases and commentaries on the Parable of the Marriage Feast, the Fall of the Angels, the Deluge, the Destruction of Sodom, the Incarnation, and the story of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, is yet entirely free from the almost insane exaltation of virginity in and for itself which is so common. There is no nobler or more passionate appreciation of the delights of lawful love in English poetry than a passage in Jehovah's denunciation of Sodom to Abraham—Milton's famous apostrophe is a coarse and diffuse example of rhetorical commonplace in comparison—and the whole poem, though quaint now and then, is full of sombre energy, mixed, as in the destruction of Babylon and of the fire from Heaven, with description of great power. *Patience* has an apparently less inspiring subject; but the story of Jonah, with which the poet chiefly fills it, gives him good opportunities of which he avails himself well. The storm in particular is very good. It must no doubt be admitted that the slightly grotesque effect of continuous and regular alliteration, and the way in which it compels even poets very fertile in resource to choose the wrong word instead of the right for the mere sake of an initial letter, receive some illustration here. But the result is by no means fatal.

As a whole, however, *The Pearl* is undoubtedly the pearl of the three. As too often happens, the well-intentioned and very amiable partiality of its latest editor has set some against it; but this is always indefensible. It need only be read—and it is by no means difficult to read—to show its real beauty. There

The Pearl.

can be no reasonable doubt that it describes the loss of a daughter, probably in early age, who may very likely have borne the actual name of Margaret, beloved by the Middle Age because of the charming and popular legend of the patroness saint, because of its own harmonious sound, and because of the endless plays on the meanings "pearl" and "daisy" which it suggested.[1] This

Pearl pleasant to princes' pay—

(the first line)—this

Privy pearl withouten spot—

which, with slight changes, is the refrain of the first group—is first dealt with as a gem richly set, but dropped by the owner on the ground. The father (probably) visits the spot, almost avowedly a grave, and, falling asleep of pure sorrow, is carried off to a strange region. Following a stream he sees a white-clad maiden, whom he at first partly, and then seeing a mighty pearl set on her breast, wholly recognises. He asks her whether she is really his Pearl, since the loss of whom

I have been a joyless Jeweller.

She says "Yes." But she is not lost, though he cannot now come to her. He must wait God's will awhile; she is a queen in Heaven, which (he proving dull of understanding) she explains, adding the Parable of the Vineyard and an account of the Brides of the Lamb. He has a distant vision of the Heavenly City and the worship of the Lamb, and rashly endeavouring to cross the water, wakes.

It is easy to see that this poem is not faultless. The fault does not lie, as some would vainly speak, in the allegory: for allegory is always a natural and frequently a powerful ally to poetry, while it is never dangerous if kept in its own place. The only faults of *The Pearl* in connection with allegory are that there is, as is the case with the vast majority of narrative poems of the kind in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, far too much of a single common form —that of the *Romance of the Rose*, the following of which is actually conducted to the point of walking down the river before the adventure, such as it is, is met. But beyond this, beyond an occasional expression a little beyond reason in carrying out the minor points of

[1] Although Saint Helena and Saint Juliana have, by accident probably, the precedence of her in our earliest A.S. documents, Saint Margaret has probably a fuller series of extant Old English lives of nearly all periods than any other saint. No name was commoner, and of none do the abbreviations so often occur in familiar writing.

Est mea mens mota pro te speciosa Magota!

as the doggerel leonine has it.

allegory (it is in this that Spenser and Bunyan so far excel their brother allegorists), and beyond an occasional succumbing to the temptations of alliteration, there are singularly few weak points in *The Pearl*. The exceeding beauty of its descriptive passages, especially that of the strange region where the poet awoke, its

> Crystal cliffs so clear of kind,

and the mystic woods hanging down them, with their purple trunks and silver foliage; the melancholy clangour of the verse, never descending to a mere whine, but always maintaining dignity and sanity in the midst of its sense of the pity and the loss of it,—these can escape no fit reader. The poet who could give such expression to pathos in *The Pearl*, to passion in *Cleanness*, and who had such a mastery of the descriptive faculty as appears in all three pieces, was no mean poet.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY ROMANCES—METRICAL

Sir Tristrem—Havelok the Dane—King Horn—King Alisaunder—Arthour and Merlin—Richard Cœur de Lion—The *Seven Sages—Bevis of Hampton—Guy of Warwick—Ywain and Gawain—Lybeaus Desconus*—The *King of Tars—Emarè—Sir Orpheo—Florence of Rome—The Earl of Toulouse*—The *Squire of Low Degree—Sir Cleges* and *Le Fraine—Ipomydon—Amis and Amiloun—Sir Amadas—Sir Triamour—King Athelstone*, etc.—The Thornton Romances—Charlemagne Romances.

THERE has, perhaps, never been such a capital example of the danger of indulgence in literary satire by a man of the first literary genius as the comparative disrepute into which the ever (and most justly) increasing estimate of Chaucer has thrown the Early English metrical romances.[1] That Chaucer himself, in the *Rhyme of Sir Thopas*, intended to pour any real discredit on the class in general, I do not

[1] It may be convenient to give at once in a note the titles and contents of the chief collections of these romances—collections which in themselves fill one of the most satisfactory of book-shelves :—

(*a*) Ritson (J.). *Ancient Engleish Metrical Romancëes* (spelling was one of Ritson's numerous manias), 3 vols. London, 1802, containing a long and still, for all its errors and crazes, valuable dissertation, with *Ywain and Gawain, Launfal, Lybeaus Desconus, King Horn, The King of Tars, Emarè, Sir Orpheo, A Chronicle of Englelond, Florence of Rome, The Earl of Toulouse, The Squire of Low Degree, The Knight of Courtesy and the Lady of Faguel*, with, in the Appendix, another form of *Horn—Horn Child and Maiden Rimnild*.

(*b*) Weber (H.). *Metrical Romances of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Centuries* (3 vols. Edinburgh, 1810), containing a less valuable introduction, with *King Alisaunder, Sir Cleges, Le Frayne, Richard Cœur de Lion, Ipomydon, Amis and Amiloun*, the *Seven Sages, Octovian, Sir Amadas*, and the *Hunting of the Hare*.

(*c*) Utterson (R.). *Select Pieces of Popular Poetry* (2 vols. London, 1817). The first contains *Sirs Triamour, Isenbras, Degorè*, and *Gowghter*.

(*d*) Hartshorne (C. H.). *Ancient Metrical Tales*, containing among other things *King Athelstone, King Edward and the Shepherd, Florice and Blancheflour*, and part of the alliterative *William of Palerne*.

(*e*) Halliwell (J. O.). *The Thornton Romances—Sirs Perceval of Gales, Isumbras, Eglamour of Artois*, and *Degravant* (Camden Society, 1844).

(*f*) Hazlitt (W. C.). *Early Popular Poetry of England* (4 vols. London.

myself in the least believe. He probably had at most two or three "awful" examples (upon one at least of which it would not be difficult to put the finger even now) before him. And it is permissible to be equally sceptical in respect of his alleged contempt for the matter, especially the Arthurian matter, of these romances—the passages usually quoted will not bear the construction put on them. Chaucer's own adoption of different styles and treatments and sources of material is, at best, the most negative of arguments. It is as natural for some men of genius to prefer to take new ways, to strike into the path worn by the feet of none, as it is for others to produce masterpieces in kinds already tried by their contemporaries and predecessors.

However, all that can be said positively is that if Chaucer did despise the romances, he merely exhibited that not infrequent infirmity even of noble minds which makes men unjust to their immediate forerunners—which made Coleridge talk absolute foolishness about Gibbon's style, and which induced even Dryden, with his admirable critical catholicity, to imagine that Restoration verse was not merely a good thing in another way from that of the Elizabethans, but a positive improvement upon them. No such mistake can prejudice our judgment.

It is very difficult to place with any exactness the earlier, still more the earliest, examples of this fascinating form of composition in English. What is certain is that the Anglo-Saxon genius—for reasons too hastily pronounced upon by some, but for some reason or other—had very little inclination towards it. The admirable saga of *Beowulf*, though well enough known to have been modernised and copied long before the Conquest, seems to have found no imitators, or, at least, none that have survived—for the chance of an English original of *Havelok* is very strong. The enormous preponderance of attention given to sacred subjects, both in Anglo-Saxon itself and in early Middle English, must have had something to do with this; but the general decadence of Anglo-Saxon poetry after the eighth century must have had more. For in no country of Europe, except Iceland, was prose ready for the task until far later.

It has therefore to be admitted fully that the known beginnings of romance in English all came from French in point of substance, while their forms could not be evolved till the "shaking together"

1864) contains, among a great many other things, *Robert the Devil* and *Robert of Cisylle* [*Sicily*].

(*g*) Hales (J. W.) and Furnivall (F. J.). *Bishop Percy's Folio MS.* (3 vols. London, 1867) contains many variants of romances named, and some new ones, notably *Eger and Grime.*

Separate editions are noted *infra;* for collections of *Alliterative* Romance see first note to next chapter.

of English, Latin, and French itself had provided the new prosody. The earliest examples of the result now existing, and perhaps the only ones which can be reasonably attributed to a period before the year 1300,[1] are the three romances of *Sir Tristrem*, of *Havelok the Dane*, and of *King Horn;* and it is practically admitted that though the first and second at least must almost certainly have sprung from British soil, they only appeared in the English language as translations or adaptations from the French. Each is of interest enough for separate consideration at such length as is here possible.

Sir Tristrem.

In sheer intrinsic literary merit *Sir Tristrem*[2] is far from being the best of the three; in fact it is certainly the worst. But its adventitious attractions are of the most unusual kind. It is, in all probability, the first English romance in the great "matter of Britain"—the only rival, *Arthour and Merlin*, is, I think, later. It tells a story which, however it may seem to some to yield in poignancy, as in nobility of interest, to the companion loves of Lancelot and Guinevere, was even more popular in the joint days of the two, and which has maintained itself. It is identified—perhaps, indeed probably, by mistake, but still it is identified—with the interesting, if legendary, personality, and the certainly early vernacular predictions of "Thomas the Rhymer." And last, but by no means least, in almost the earliest day of the revival of Romance, it had the honour to be ushered once more to public knowledge by Sir Walter Scott.

With some of these attractions we must deal here in cruel brevity. The argument as to the question of authorship must be sought by those who are curious about it in the editions cited in the notes. It is enough to say that the "Thomas" cited by Gottfried of Strasburg, the chief continental handler of the story, can hardly have been Thomas of Erceldoune; that the story of Sir Tristrem was certainly current in French long before the date either of the "Rhymer" or of this rhyme; and that it is, all things taken together, a little improbable, to say the least, that, considering the absence of any certain Scottish poetry till nearly the end of the fourteenth century, anything so elaborate as this should have been composed in such "Inglis" by a Scot before the end of the thirteenth—and according to the dates usually assigned to Thomas the Rhymer

[1] By fifty years after that date many, probably most, of our verse romances must have come into existence. The famous Auchinleck MS., which contains a good score, is of this time; and in the *Cursor Mundi*, which is perhaps as early as 1320, we find reference not only to these but to others, such as *Sir Isumbras*, of which our existing copies are later.

[2] Scott's memorable edition of this can never, in a sense, be obsolete; but more modern apparatus and knowledge are added in those of Kölbing (Heilbronn, 1882) and M'Neill (Scottish Text Society, 1886).

(*c.* 1280) considerably before it. At any rate, the poem in its present form can hardly have come from any one who wrote north of the Tweed. That it is, as its latest Scottish editor holds, a southernised version of a work of Erceldoune does not seem to me entirely impossible. But it rests on no evidence.

The form would lead us to believe it not much, if at all, anterior to the fourteenth century, the stanza used being one of those complicated and bizarre ones which, as has been explained in the last chapter, came from the attempt to adjust Provençal-French metres to English rhythm. It resembles one previously mentioned in the arrangement of the rhymes alternately in an eleven-lined stanza broken by a short fresh-rhymed bob at the ninth line. The best argument for its being older than 1300 is that the staple line is of six not of eight syllables—for, as we have seen, the six-syllabled line or half-line somewhat anticipated its longer and more convenient amplification into eights. After the plump statement that the author was at Erceldoune and spake with Thomas, hearing a *geste* of Tristrem (which, by the way, is an odd fashion of signature, but very likely a shift to father work on a well-known name indirectly), it passes to a stanza of gnomic reflexion, very common, as we shall see, in the earliest days of English romance, and then plunges into its story, the Tristram-saga proper—the famous and fatal loves of Tristrem and Yseult being preceded in true saga fashion by a history of the unhappy contest of Rouland Rhys, Tristrem's father, with Douk Morgan.

The rather unsuitable nature of the stanza for narrative is occasionally relieved by a middle rhyme—

> They ne raught [recked] how dear it bought,

and on the whole does fairly well; but the earliness of the piece finds a certain support in its crudity. The repulsive story of the fashion in which Yseult would have paid her maiden Brengwain's self-devotion is not in the least softened, and the poet does not show himself able, as his German predecessor had been able, to bring out the unmatched attractiveness of the sylvan life of Tristrem and the Irish princess. But there are good touches, at least not lost if not actually invented by the minstrel, such as that when the luckless, if unamiable, Mark discovers his queen and Tristrem with the sword between them—

> A sunbeam full bright
> Shone upon the queen,
> At a bore [hole]
> On her face so sheen—
> *And Mark rewed therefore.*

It is not always that later poetry has succeeded in achieving or retaining a phrase so simple, sensuous, and passionate as that last line, which is almost the equal of Sappho's

ἔγω δὲ μόνα κατεύδω.

Horn[1] and *Havelok*[2] are in less elaborate metrical form. The metre of both comes under the general designation of the octosyllabic couplet—in *Havelok* lengthened and "swung" by the admission of trisyllabic feet, in *Horn* shortened so as to show that the poet was still hovering, as many did for a time, between sixes (or sevens) and eights. There is also some similarity between the general subject of both, which is that favourite romance *donnée* of the heir kept out of his own. The palm, both for individuality of story and for spirit of narration, decidedly belongs to *Havelok*, which has all the notes of a genuine local saga, and not merely of a literary composition on accepted romance lines. There is in it a double wrong done—the innocent Havelok, the heir of Denmark, being excluded by his guardian Godard, while Goldborough, heiress of England, is similarly treated by her tutor Godric. But Havelok, being as a male heir more dangerous, is exposed to greater personal danger than his destined bride, for Godard, determining to make away with him altogether, hands him over to the fisherman Grim to drown. Grim treats him roughly enough, but a night fortunately intervenes, and before the actual immersion the fisher's wife sees the sacred flame-aureole, sign of kinghood, on Havelok's brow, and her husband, having also prudently ascertained by a trick that he was like to have traitor's wages for his crime, gives it up and escapes oversea to England, where he lands at the future Grimsby. Havelok, brought up as a mere fisher-boy, seeks service at Lincoln Castle, and distinguishing himself by strength and athletic proficiency as one of the "kitchen knaves" dear to romance, is chosen as Goldborough's husband by the usurper Godric, who, milder-minded or more economical in crime than his Danish counterpart, only plots to degrade not to slay his charge. Goldborough is naturally enough displeased at having to marry a scullion, but at night the mystic flame reconciles her to her lot. Right thus meets right, a party is formed for the young pair, and the two traitors receive their proper doom. In this, of course, there is a certain amount of romantic stock-matter, the humours and promotion of the scullion Havelok being a very favourite and early device found even in the ancient and brilliant French *chanson*

Havelok the Dane.

[1] Two versions, as noted above, in Ritson; there are also three or four more modern editions, and the whole is given in Morris and Skeat's *Specimens*, vol. i.

[2] Ed. Skeat, E.E.T.S.

de geste of *Aliscans*. But the general tenor is, as has been said, unusually vigorous and fresh. The poet strides along like a man who has a real story of his own to tell, and is not merely compounding one out of dried or bottled materials. In fact, there is no doubt that the tradition as to the origin of Grimsby was an old one in Lincolnshire; and we find Robert Manning,[1] a Lincolnshire man, in a rather quaint state of dubiety between his early familiarity with the story and the silence of his graver historical authorities on the matter. For, as has been, and will be again hinted more than once, the mediæval mind—naturally enough, considering the vast surrounding and invading seas of nescience which bounded its islands of knowledge—rarely seems to have had any distinctively critical power of distinguishing fact from fiction, and could at most attain to surprise at not finding the former in places where no trained historical critic would dream of looking for it.

Horn, though a good poem, and preserved in various forms which have made it one of the best known of its kind, is less racy either of any particular soil, or of any special poetical faculty. A certain King Murray—the locality of whose kingdom is described with sufficient vagueness as "biweste"—and his wife Queen Godhild had a son Horn, who was a very beautiful child. *King Horn.*

> Fairer was none than he was,
> He was bright as the glass,
> He was white as the flour,
> Rose-red was his colour—

lines which, not unfairly, give the key-note of the real, but rather conventional, prettiness which marks the poem. As Murray was riding by the seashore he met with fifteen shiploads of Saracens keen, who frankly avowed their intention—

> The land-folk we shall slay,

and began with the king. Horn's extreme beauty saves him from slaughter, but he is put in a boat, with his two companions Athulf and Fikenild, and set adrift. By luck and pluck they come safe to the coast of Westernesse, where the king gives him protection; the king's steward, Athelbrus, instructs him in knightly ways, and the king's daughter Rimenhild falls deeply in love with him. Indeed *Horn Child and Maiden Rimnild* is the title of one of the actual

[1] In a long passage (ed. Hearne above cited, i. pp. 25, 26); given also in Prof. Skeat's Introduction, ix., x. Manning, after duly translating Langtoft, who barely refers to Havelok, bitterly complains that neither Gildas, nor Bede, nor Henry of Huntingdon, nor William of Malmesbury, nor Pierce of Bridlington (*i.e.* Langtoft himself) says anything about the incidents of the romance.

versions of the story. Athulf is a good friend, even withstanding the awkward temptation of a moment when Rimenhild, mistaking him for Horn, makes the most undisguised advances; Fikenild is a traitor, but his machinations, though nearly successful, are defeated, and Horn, of course, comes to his own in love and kingdom.

The fifteen hundred short lines of the poem do not allow time for it to be tedious—the great danger of these somewhat identically constructed stories—and there are passages of directness and vigour which deserve all the more recognition in that the piece, though probably translated from the French, is still very early, and can have had very few English originals to furnish the writer with stock phrases and passages. One of the straightest and best is when Horn, with his beloved's ring on his finger, meets the slayer of his father—

> Before him saw he stand
> That driven him had from land
> And that his father slew.
> To him his sword he drew,
> He looked upon his ring,
> And thought on Rimenhild,
> He smote him through the heart
> That sore him gan to smart,

which, though the last line is a little superfluous, cannot be called contemptible in so early an attempt. It is worth while to notice the assonance in *ring* and *hild*. Assonance does not suit the English ear, and is rarely attempted in English; but it was so prevalent in the French models of the writers of the thirteenth century, and it is such a help to a novice in rhyming, that it would be strange if it did not sometimes occur.

We may conveniently take next a group of romances, in all probability not much junior to these, that is to say, dating at latest but a little within the beginning of the fourteenth century, and attributed by a German scholar, who was honourably distinguished for the union of philological and literary competence, Dr. Eugen Kölbing, to the same hand. I cannot say that I myself see any strong probability of this, but at the same time I cannot see any very serious argument against it; and its admission would add to the list of English poets a figure anonymous indeed, but more considerable in quantity of work than any other before Chaucer, and certainly not inferior to any except the equally shadowy personage, to whom, as has been said in the last chapter, the other quartette of *The Green Knight*, *The Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience* has been similarly gifted. At any rate the four romances themselves, *King Alisaunder*,[1] *Arthour and*

[1] Ed. Weber, as above.

Merlin,[1] *Richard Cœur de Lion*,[2] and the *Seven Sages*,[3] are each and all among the most interesting of their kind, among the oldest, among the most considerable in scale and subject; and whether they had a common author or not, they are equally worthy of consideration.

The history of the formation and transformation of the mediæval legend-history of Alexander belongs to another story than that of English literature. It is sufficient to say here that the English romance in question follows generally the lines of the great French *Roman d'Alixandre*, but assigns greater proportionate space and credence to the initial fables about Nectanebus (Neptanabus in the English), the Egyptian enchanter-king who revenged himself upon Philip by seducing Olympias in the guise of the god Ammon. The wonders and episodes of the later part, the Fountain of Youth, and the rest are, on the other hand, curtailed, but as it is the poem extends to more than 8000 lines in octosyllabic couplets of a good stamp. These couplets, which form the measure of all the romances now in question, and supply one of the arguments for their common authorship, show a considerable advance in ease and grip over the respective kinds of *Horn* and *Havelok*. The writer in all rejects, or, if the phrase be thought more appropriate, has not arrived at, the hard and fast French octosyllable, and allows himself *Christabel* equivalence in a very satisfactory manner. Another very noticeable peculiarity shared by some, though not all, of the group is the interposition—in such a manner as justified Weber, the poem's editor, in taking the phenomenon as implying chapter or "fytte" division—of short gnomic or descriptive prefatory remarks, which have nothing whatever to do with the narrative, as thus—

King Alisaunder.

> Merry time is the wood to sere,
> The corn ripeth in the ear,
> The lady is ruddy in the cheer,
> And maid bright in the lere,
> The knights hunteth after deer,
> On foot and on destrere,

[1] Ed. Kölbing, Leipzig, 1890. It had already been printed for the Abbotsford Club (1838) by Turnbull, and like many of the romances in this chapter, abstracted still earlier by Ellis in his famous *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*, which (despite a tone of persiflage sometimes though seldom inappropriate) is still the best introduction to the subject, and easily procurable in Bohn's Library.

[2] Ed. Weber.

[3] In two forms, one given by Weber, and the other by Wright for the Percy Society (1845) with a valuable introduction.

which comes, apropos of nothing whatever, between the story of Alexander's coronation, as Prince Expectant and King-coadjutor, and his knighting. The whole poem is one of the most spirited of the romances, and Weber's claim for it, that it is less burdened with expletives than others, is just, and even within the mark. These nuisances, which appear with the very rise of the style, which are not absent even in Chaucer, and which in fifteenth-century work like that of Lonelich become a mere abomination, are quite rare in it, and the author's faculty of description is extremely vivid and good. Where he fails, as all English and most mediæval poets before Chaucer do fail, is in character.

Arthour and Merlin is still longer than *Alisaunder*, extending to not much fewer than 10,000 lines, not dissimilar in character from those just noticed, but less regularly and abundantly provided with gnomic introductions or "fytte" headings. It is a verse rendering of what is called the "Vulgate" *Merlin*, an early history of the court of Arthur, preceded by an account of Merlin's own birth, and of the adventure of Uther with Igraine, which seems to have been thrown into French prose before the end of the twelfth century, or not much later, and of which, besides other verse renderings, including one by the above Lonelich, only published in part (see Book iv.), there is a good prose English version published by the Early English Text Society. The most interesting parts of the Arthurian story are not here, and, as in all the *Merlins*, a vast amount of space is taken up by battles with the Saxons and with Arthur's rival kings, which Malory's extraordinary literary instinct led him to omit or cut short. But, on the other hand, there are things in these *Merlins* which we miss in Malory, especially the earlier and comelier version of the enchanter's enchantment by his lady-love. Apart from the subject matter, the piece deserves commendation, inferior indeed to that allotted to the *Alisaunder*, but not small. Still, if they had the same author, he had either not yet learnt in the *Arthour* to do without expletives, or had in it succumbed to a bad habit which he had earlier resisted; and the catalogues of names are rather tedious. The great interest of the piece is that it is the first setting of the romance of Arthur (for Layamon supposed himself to be telling history) that we possess in English—the king of all stories of the land having at last come to his own after linguistic exile for a century and a half in French. Indeed there are touches about the piece which might justify a conclusion that it is decidedly older than the *Alisaunder*, and may even belong to the thirteenth, not to the fourteenth century.

Arthour and Merlin.

Richard Cœur de Lion, the third of the group, is pretty certainly the best. It has not merely the general interest of being "matter of

Britain," but the more direct appeal of being the *geste* of a great English prince, told at a time near enough to his own to have the relish and savour of popular fancy and fondness. It is rather more than 7000 lines long; and the metre is managed with a spirit of which we find few examples in *Arthour and Merlin*, and though more, yet fewer than here in *Alisaunder* itself. Even the finale, "common form" as it is, will show this— *Richard Cœur de Lion.*

> Thus ended Rychard our King,
> God give us all good endíng,
> And his soul rest and roo,
> And *our* souls when we come thereto!

Here is the real *diable au corps* of the ballad-romance style—the combined faculty of speaking simply and straight, and *metring* with vigour and variety. Nor is the matter of the poem inferior to the manner. Sir Walter Scott has made it better known than most of our romances through his quotations in the *Talisman* notes, referring to the grimly humorous episodes of the cooking of the Saracen's head instead of a pig's jowl, and of the king's ferocious banquet, on the same material, to the Paynim ambassadors. A recent French historian who cried affrightedly over a certain letter of Troubridge to Nelson, "This is the laughter of cannibals," might be better justified here; yet the humour of the thing and the spirit of it quite carry off the savagery.

Here too, almost for the first time (save in that very likely contemporary proem of Robert of Gloucester which has been quoted), appears really *English* patriotism, the triumph in the Lion-heart's exploit as a king of England, which (call him Angevin or anything else) he was. The refrain "Richard our King" obviously comes from the heart; the malison on his traitor brother—

> his brother John
> That was accursed, flesh and bone—

is equally hearty. Never before in English do we find the real dare-devil tone, rightly associated with Romance, as here—

> He [Richard] gan cry, *As arms!* Gare!
> *Cœur de Lyon*—how they fare!
> Anon lept King Richard
> Upon his good steed Lyard,
> And his English and his Templeres
> Lightly lept on their destreres,
> And flings into the heathen host
> In the name of the Holy Ghost.

On few things would it be pleasanter to dwell than on this poem of real flesh and blood, which is good in its overture as to the fair fiend "Cassodorien" (who takes the place of Eleanor as Henry's wife and Richard's mother, with, no doubt, a remembrance of the Angevin house-fairy Melusine), better in the "lion's heart" episode, but best in its fighting scenes. Indeed it is the first and best fighting poem in Middle English. But we must pass on, only observing that here also the heroic couplet, and that curious English fancy for winding up with it at a marking or turning point which is so noticeable in Shakespeare, make their appearance—

> And swore | by Je | su that | made moon | and star |
> Ayenst | the Sa | racens he | should learn | to war |

(unless indeed this is an embellishment of the editor's). The gnomic insertion occurs now and then in this poem.

The *Seven Sages* is the shortest of the four, not much exceeding 4000 lines, and like all the versions, prose and verse, of the famous Eastern collection or collections from which it is derived, it is in fact a mere series of short tales bound together by one of the usual straps—in this case the stories are told by a wicked queen to support her false accusation of her stepson, and by his Seven Wise Masters on his behalf. The general literary interest of these things and their far travel from the East is great; but though in the piece, and still more in the later *Gesta Romanorum*, they produced noteworthy books in English,[1] their special attraction for us is less, inasmuch as they were but translations of translations of translations, having been beyond all doubt decanted through Latin and French, and perhaps Greek before either on their way from their Eastern homes to their English receptacles. They are, however, interesting as the earliest, or among the earliest, instances in our language of the short verse-story itself—the *fabliau* which, in a couple of generations or so, Chaucer was in the *Canterbury Tales* to make the vehicle of one of the capital efforts of European poetry. Although there is no doubt some general resemblance, of the kind almost unavoidable, to the other three, the *Seven Sages* seems to me even less likely than *Arthour and Merlin* to be the work of the same author as *Alisaunder* or as *Cœur de Lion*, for there is much less spirit in the verse, and there is present that indefinite, but to careful observers very noticeable, inability to distinguish between prosaic and poetical incidents which marks off the born prose-writer

The *Seven Sages.*

[1] The actual English *Gesta* may not be very early, but authority seems to favour the English origin of the Latin original.

(in the bad sense) from the born poet. That some of the stories in the *Seven Sages* are disgusting does not so much matter; the Saracen's head episodes of Richard are not precisely delicious. But the poet of *Richard* knew how to carry these off, the poet of the *Seven Sages* did not know how to carry off the others; and the difference, though not very easy to prove by example, is at once felt in the reading

All the metrical romances hitherto noticed are beyond doubt either actually of the thirteenth century, or only a very little younger. But it is a matter of difficulty and guesswork to decide which of the much larger number that remain should accompany them, and which should be postponed till we come to the fifteenth or the late fourteenth century, from which probably the larger number of the actual manuscripts date. Thus, as noted above, we have a notice of *Sir Isumbras* in the *Cursor Mundi*, or about 1340 at latest; but our text of it—that in the Thornton MS.—is a full century later. On the whole, the best plan will probably be to notice here all the metrical romances, which may possibly be older in their original forms, if not in their present texts, than the death of Chaucer, and to keep for the company of Malory those which, like *Sir Launfal* in Chester's version, and the work of Henry Lonelich, distinctly belong to the later time by authorship if not in substance.

It is probable, but not certain, that all the English romances—even those which, like *Havelok* and *Horn* among those already mentioned, like *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick* among those to come, rest upon English traditions and deal with English scenes—were directly translated from French originals. Sometimes, as in the just-mentioned case of *Sir Isumbras*, we have no knowledge of such originals, and sometimes, as in the case of *Sir Amadas*, there is opportunity for confusion.[1] There may have been exceptions to the general rule of translation from French; but there is no reason to think that the rule was not general. And it was probably the exigencies of the translation—the termination of the original sense, leaving part of a line still to be filled up, and the like—which encouraged, and to some faint degree excused, the practice of stuffing and padding with expletives and stock phrases that brought the whole class into really undeserved disrepute.

Only brief observations can be made on each of these romances, but except by oversight none shall be passed over; and in face of the difficulty, not to say impossibility, of dating them with any certainty, they shall be mentioned for the most part in the company

[1] The *Cursor Mundi* mentions this too, but with the addition of the heroine's name, Idoine. This identifies it for us with an existing French romance of the double title, quite different from our English *Sir Amadas*.

and order in which they appeared in the printed collections of Ritson, Weber, and others.

Guy of Warwick and *Bevis of Hampton*,[1] which were the first except *Sir Tristrem* to enjoy the honours of separate publication, owed those honours in all probability rather to their traditional fame, to their great size, and to the fact that both are found in the precious Auchinleck MS.—which Boswell's father gave to the Faculty of Advocates, and which is not merely the largest but one of the oldest of existing Romance MSS.—than to their intrinsic merit either as poetry or, except for the mere adventures, as story. In these last respects—to speak with all the tenderness due to such famous names—they are rather poor things, inferior to the majority of their companions, and owing almost all their charm to the mere common form, the ready-bottled herbs and essences, of the average romance of chivalry. Neither has anything specially English about it except the names, and the adventures of both are carried on mostly in countries other than England. *Bevis of Hampton*, the better of the two, owing to the lively characters of Josiane the heroine and Ascapart the giant,[2] rests upon the well-worn theme of a faithless wife, a murdered husband and father, a disinherited son, and an intruding tyrant. There is some interest in Bevis's vengeance on his father's murderer and his own wrongdoer, appropriately named Sir Murdour; and his horse Arundel and sword Morglay rank well among those favourite properties of Romance. But the kindness (somewhat "coming" and forward, but legitimately imitated from the conduct of all Paynim princesses in the *chansons de geste*) of Josiane, her courage, her fidelity, are really the salvation of the piece. *Guy of Warwick* (another and still longer tale of adventures all over the Romance world, with a huge *coda* telling those of Rembrun or Raynburn, the hero's son) lacks this attraction. Felice, the heroine here, is a cold and capricious mistress (the pattern doubtless of the Polisardas and Miraguardas of Spanish fiction), who is indeed useful to the story by constantly requiring new exploits from her suitor. It is true that he forgets all about her by the way once, and only the sight of the wedding-ring that he is about to put on another's finger reminds him at the

Bevis of Hampton.

Guy of Warwick.

[1] They were both edited for the Abbotsford Club by Turnbull, *Bevis* in 1838, and *Guy* (a mighty quarto of black letter) in 1840. The eccentric C. K. Sharpe furnished both with frontispieces in the Retzsch style, one of which, that to *Bevis*, is very comic. *Guy* has been re-edited, in both fourteenth and fifteenth century forms, with immense care by Dr. Zupitza for the E.E.T.S., and *Bevis* by Dr. Kölbing for the same society.

[2] Ascapart now quietly guards the gates of Southampton with his victor and benefactor; but he was not a good giant to the end, and was killed after turning traitor.

fifty-ninth minute and second of the eleventh hour. And she is justly, though by no means interestingly, punished when Guy after marriage is seized by a craze of chastity, and determines to desert his wife and unborn child, spending the rest of his days as a palmer and hermit. There is plenty of fighting (for he has not abjured that pleasure) in the sequel, including the famous combat with Colbrand; and Guy, at last coming home, is not recognised by Felice till at the point of death he sends her ring to her, and she receives his last breath and dies after him. The story appears to have been almost without exception the most popular of all the romances in England from a very early time, and its immense length and varied incidents give, of course, abundant scope for successful treatment. But in none of the versions which have come down to us (Ellis would make an exception for the Colbrand part) does it seem to have fallen into the hands of a poet of any power. The crowning moment of the meeting of Guy and Felice, the latter unknowing, the former conscious, is blundered with a completeness which makes us think vividly of the admirable success of the Scottish poet Henryson at the somewhat similar meeting of Troilus and the lazar Cressid. The sheer silliness which dogs the footsteps of Romance shows itself in Guy's forgetfulness, which is as absurd as his conscious succumbing to new charms could have been made natural. Almost every chance throughout the long record is consistently missed, and the undoubted popularity of the thing in verse and prose, in MS. and print, in recitation and reading can have been due to the adventures alone.[1]

Of Ritson's collection,[2] the *Chronicle* does not here concern us, *Sir Launfal* we postpone, and the interesting *Lady of Faguel* (Fayel) is rather a ballad than a romance. *Ywain and Gawain* is a free adaptation of Chrestien de Troyes's *Chevalier au Lyon*, one of the earliest poems of the Arthurian cycle, which, having been also paraphrased by Hartmann von Aue, has the advantage of appearing in English, French, and German. The English poet, though unknown (that prolific eidolon,

Ywain and Gawain.

[1] The point where the poet fails least is perhaps the short passage describing the revulsion of feeling which causes Guy to quit his wife, and which comes from the sudden thought, as he gazes on his fair heritage from the towers of Warwick of the carnage and devastation he has wrought—

> All for the sake of woman's love,
> And not for the sake of God above.

But even this is not very well done. *Guy*, it should be said, is partly in couplet, partly in twelve-line romance stanza. *Bevis* has the same partition, but the stanzas take the shorter six-line form.

[2] See note, p. 82.

the supposed author of *Arthour and Merlin*, has been credited with this also), does not compare ill with his famous fellows. The poem, which is about 4000 lines long, in couplets, has spirit and merit throughout. *Lybeaus Desconus* (which strange appellation is only *Le Beau Déconnu* with its Old French form misspelt) is also a Gawain poem, dealing with a son of that courteous knight. It is about half the length of the last, in stanzas of twelve six-syllabled lines. This is not a very good romance medium, but the poem is above the average. Its story is a variant of the "Daughter of Hippocrates"; but Sir Lybeaus is not exposed to the danger of refusing to kiss the worm's mouth, for she takes the initiative, and the transformation scene is very gracious. The *King of Tars* (same stanza, but in fairly regular eights for 1 2 4 5 7 8 10 11, and sixes for lines 3 6 9 12) gives a Christian and Paynim fighting story of average interest in not quite 1200 lines. But *Emare* (trisyllabic, *Emarè*), in the same stanza, but 200 lines shorter, is one of the best. The verse is good; the description of the cloth embroidered in the four corners with the stories of *Amadas and Idoyne*, *Tristrem and Iseult*, *Florice and Blancheflour*, and the *Sowdone of Babylon* is one of the best stock-passages of mediæval upholstery, and the character of Emarè is touched with a distinctness and a tenderness which are none too common in these poems. It is one of the class of stories in which fathers fall in love with their daughters and are resisted. That Emarè should be set afloat in a boat by her father, blown to a friendly shore, married to the king, plotted against by her mother-in-law, again floated forth with her little child, once more succoured by good Samaritans, and finally restored to her proper place and to the chastened affection of her repentant father, is all common form, if not commonplace. What is not commonplace is the graceful fashion in which the tale is told, and the writer's abstinence from the long-windedness which is so frequent a fault. *Sir Orpheo* is *Orpheus and Eurydice* with a happy ending, for which the Middle Ages had a possibly childish, but certainly healthy liking. It has some 500 lines in couplets.[1] *Florence of Rome* (over 2000 lines in the twelve-lined stanza) is the daughter of the Emperor. She is most unseasonably courted by Sir Garcy, Emperor of Constantinople, who was a hundred years old, and whose disqualifications are spiritedly told in this stanza—

Lybeaus Desconus.

The *King of Tars.*

Emarè.

Sir Orpheo.

Florence of Rome.

[1] The Auchinleck version of this, which Laing printed (see first note of next chapter), is called *Orfeo and Heurodis*. Both contain charming descriptions of Fairyland, which, with the parting of husband and wife and other passages, make the piece one of the most delightful of the whole class.

His flesh trembled with great eld,
His blood cold, his body unweld,
His lippes blue forthy;
He had more mister of a good fire,
Of right brands burning shire,
To beik his bonès by,
A soft bath, a warm bed,
Than any maiden for to wed,
And good encheason why—
For he was bruised and all to-broken,
Far travelled in harness and of war wroken,
He told them readily.

Florence and her father naturally object. Sir Garcy, who is not too old to fight, attacks Rome and brings it to great straits. Florence, to spare bloodshed and misery, offers to sacrifice herself, but her father will not hear of it, and dies in a sally. Two brothers, Sir Miles and Sir Emere, get the better of Garcy, and Florence marries Emere; but his brother plays the traitor during Emere's absence, carries off the faithful Florence after a false report of Emere's death has proved useless, hangs her to a tree and beats her, like the Counts of Carrion in the *Cid* story. Nor is this the last of her trials, though, of course, all comes right. This piece is rather unequal, and the *Earl of Toulouse* (1200 lines, in the same stanza) is rather slight. But the *Squire of Low Degree* (a happy title, and one which made its fortune) comes, in about the same length of couplets, up to its promise. The famous distich with which it opens—

The Earl of Toulouse.

It was a squire of low degree
That loved the king's daughter of Hungarỳ—

obeys, unconsciously no doubt, the maxims of authority as to the advantage of plunging the reader straight into the subject, and he is never let go. The introduction of the valiant squire (who, for all his "low degree," was marshal of the king's hall) is cunningly managed, not too soon after the opening nor too late for the refrain to ring in the ear—

The *Squire of Low Degree.*

And all was for that ladye—
The king's daughter of Hungarỳ

The garden, with the favourite mediæval catalogues of trees and flowers, and the references to other romances, follows, and still

The king's daughter of Hungarỳ!

rings agreeably now and then. The squire tells his love, and the

lady accepts it in all honour, with stated conditions, and a warning against the steward—stewards are generally wicked. But cautious as she is, she ends with "kisses three"—one less than the pale knight gave La Belle Dame Sans Merci, but not made more lucky by their sacred number. The steward sees them, and vows mischief. The king will not believe his calumny, but the steward undertakes to show the lovers together, and unluckily the squire, after taking leave of the king to seek adventures, returns under cover of night—

> To take leave of that lady free,
> The king's daughter of Hungarỳ !

The interview takes place, but the enemy is upon them. The squire cuts the steward's throat, but is overcome by numbers and imprisoned, his lady thinking him dead, because her father's men have cunningly changed his clothes with the dead steward's at her door. Her father offers her a curious catalogue of delights [1] if she will leave off mourning ; but she will not, and after seven years the relenting king sends the squire to make him a name in Lombardy and gives him his daughter at his return. A fairy tale without fairies, but a pleasant one and well told.

The chief constituents of the next collection (Weber's, in 1810), *Alisaunder*, *Cœur de Lion*, and the *Seven Sages*, have been already noticed ; but it contains others which must not be passed over, and one at least which is of great merit. The makeweights of the great *Alexander* poem in the first volume are *Sir Cleges*, a short piece in not quite fifty twelve-lined stanzas—respectable, but of no great note—on the favourite mediæval motive of the knight who spends his all, not in riotous living, but in generous housekeeping, and recovers it. This in the present case is partly by divine mercy (which gives him cherries at Christmas), and partly by his own shrewd wit and stout heart, avenging him on the court officials, who strive to hinder or blackmail his present of these cherries to the king. The other is a translation of the *Lai le Fraine* of Marie de France, rather a *fabliau* than a romance. The second volume, which contains *Richard Cœur de Lion*, contains also two romances of great excellence, *Ipomydon* and *Amis and Amiloun*. The former is one of the best stories, and not the worst told, of the whole class. It is in some 2400 lines of couplets, and bears a remarkable analogy to the at present untraced "Sir Beaumains" episode of Malory. The hero is the heir of Apulia

Sir Cleges and *Le Fraine.*

Ipomydon.

[1] This list of all the things the Middle Ages loved best—finery and music, wines and foods, sports and pastimes, castles and yachts, with crews singing heyho and rumbelow, "gentyle pottes with ginger green," and "blankets of fustyane"—fills over 100 lines.

("Pouille" or "Poile," as it meets us in French and English romance), the pupil of Sir Tholomew, one of the good old knights so common, and the suitor of the heiress of Calabria. He determines to rest only on his own merits, visits her court incognito, makes himself conspicuous and attractive by the usual mediæval virtue of lavish giving and skill in the hunting art, and then retires to let his charms work. After a time he goes to the (then) adjacent court of Saxony, obtains the post of honorary and honourable lover to the queen, and from this point of vantage enters for the tournament which is to decide the spousals of the Calabrian princess. He puts on daily fresh disguises of white, red, and black armour, with all things to suit; overcomes, of course, but, in true romance fashion, is not satisfied with so easy a victory. Difficulties with foes or unknown friends, Sir Camys and Sir Campanys, have to follow before all is as it should be.

Amis and Amiloun.

As for *Amis and Amiloun*, no Middle Age story is the superior of this for pathos and beauty; but it is only an adaptation of a much older French *chanson de geste*, and so interests us less here than those romances which are either English by origin, or have no known French original, or are adapted with some special difference. The third volume, which contains the *Seven Sages*, contains also *Octovian Imperator* (a story of some liveliness, but a very bad poem, in 317 six-lined stanzas, syllabled 888484 and rhymed *aaabab*), *Sir Amadas*, and *The Hunting of the Hare*. This last, like the *Tournament of Tottenham* and some others, is a burlesque of some, but no extraordinary, merit. *Sir Amadas*, which has nothing to do with *Amadas and Idoyne*, but is found, as we shall see, in another version, has rather less than 800 lines in the twelve-lined stanza. It is a sort of variant of *Sir Cleges*, but the knight recovers his fortunes not by shrewdness but by his charity to a dead corpse which he finds in ghastly conditions, it having been kept from burial by a brutal creditor. The general poetical merit of *Sir Amadas* is not great, but the situation is good, and there is one couplet which only wanted a little trimming to make it a sublime one. The knight, having seen the festering debtor, is at a feast of much splendour—

Sir Amadas.

> [But]
> Sir Amadas made little cheer,
> For the dead corse that lay on bier
> Full mickle his thought was than [then].

The first three of the Utterson Romances—*Sir Triamour*, *Sir Isenbras*, *Sir Degorè*—are taken from early printed copies and are in very lamentable state—the twelve-lined stanzas of *Sir Triamour*,

for instance, appearing by the grace of the copyist or the printer in irregular batches of threes, varying from six lines to eighteen. And the curse of prose, which, with such rare exceptions, weighed in the fifteenth century, is heavy on it. But the story, which is one of the class of queens wronged by stewards, is touching.[1] Still better in this respect, though even worse off in others, is the beautiful legend of *Sir Isenbras* or *Isumbras*, who in his domestic happiness and worldly pride forgot God, and was punished by the successive loss of possessions, children, and wife, to have them restored after he was purified by much suffering and gallant daring in deed. *Sir Degorè* (supposed to be = L'égaré, but unfortunately responsible for "Diggory") is a short romance in about 1000 lines of couplets celebrating the prowess of a "love-child." *Sir Gowghter*, which Utterson was the first to print, is a very interesting and spirited variant of the story of "Robert the Devil," in between fifty and sixty twelve-lined stanzas.

Sir Triamour.

Hartshorne's book, containing much interesting matter, and possessed of all the attractions of the Pickering Press, has always been a trial to students from its confused arrangement, its presentment of shreds and patches, and its careless editing. But it gave from different Cambridge MSS. *King Athelstone*, a spirited story of the ordeal by fire, dating from the fourteenth century, in the twelve-lined stanza; *King Edward and the Shepherd*, one of the innumerable variants of the favourite *donnée* of a king guesting incognito with his subjects; an extract from *Florice and Blancheflour*, nearly the most popular of all mediæval stories; one from *William and the Werewolf*, which being alliterative is reserved for the next chapter; and a great number of small burlesques or *fabliaux*, the *Tournament of Tottenham*, the *Boy and the Basin*, the *Cokwolds' Dance*, etc.

King Athelstone, etc.

The Thornton Romances[2] give the English version, not a very valuable or extensive one, of the great story of *Sir Percevale* (143 stanzas as below); another version, in twelve-lined stanzas, of *Sir Isumbras*; *Sir Eglamour* (also twelves), the nearest to *Sir Thopas* of all the romances in faults, and chiefly *salvandum* because it contains the name "Christabel"; and *Sir Degravant*, in the same stanza

[1] Mr. Halliwell printed a MS. version for the Percy Society, and there is another in the Percy Folio. The editors of this last seem to think better than I do of the execution of this tale of King Aradas and Queen Margaret and the wicked steward Marrock; but I quite agree with their praise of its spirit and substance.

[2] So called from their transcriber, a Yorkshireman, who a little before the middle of the fifteenth century included them (with much of the most noteworthy work of or attributed to Hampole, and other things) in one of the *omnium gatherum* MS. books so fortunately fashionable in the Middle Ages. It belongs to Lincoln Cathedral.

as *Sir Percevale*, a rougher but less mawkish composition. The companion Camden Society volume by Mr. Robson, which is chiefly noteworthy for the alliterative *Auntyrs of Arthur* (see next chap.), also contains a different version of *Sir Amadas*, and a non-alliterated Arthurian romance in sixty stanzas like *Percevale* and *Degravant*, sixteen-lined, each quatrain consisting of a monorhymed octosyllabic triplet and a six. The Thornton Romances.

Lastly, we may mention a group of Romance which in subject has least interest of all, while of its most attractive members the alliterative story of *Rauf Coilyear* belongs to the next chapter, and Lord Berners's *Huon of Bordeaux* (prose) to the next Book but one. These are the English Charlemagne Romances, of which some at least, if not most, in their earlier form must date from our present period. These are *Sir Ferumbras*, a long version of the French *Fierabras* in some 9000 lines of the six-lined stanza; the *Sowdone of Babylone*, another version of the same in an early kind of the ballad quatrain of eights and sixes—early and long (3000 and odd verses) for this form; the *Siege of Milan* and *Roland and Otuel*, each in the twelve-lined stanza and each about 1600 lines long; a fragment of an English *Song of Roland*. All these, with Caxton's prose *Charles the Great* and *Four Sons of Aymon*, which will fall like *Huon* to be noticed hereafter, have been printed for the Early English Text Society. None of the romances just named is of the first merit or interest. Indeed, the Carlovingian epic, when stripped of the intense idiosyncrasy of the *chanson* form, hardly tolerates any other save prose. Charlemagne Romances.

CHAPTER V

EARLY ROMANCES—ALLITERATIVE

Gawain and the Green Knight—The *Awntyrs of Arthur*—*William of Palerne*—*Joseph of Arimathea*—The Thornton *Morte d'Arthure*—The *Destruction of Troy*—The *Pistyl of Susan*.

THE interesting phenomenon of the revival of alliteration, the facts and causes of which in the early fourteenth century have been more than once referred to, naturally had its chief exercising ground in the field of Romance. The most remarkable of all English alliterative poems later than Anglo-Saxon times, the *Vision concerning Piers the Plowman*, falls for treatment in the next Book, and a good many others date only from the fifteenth century. But not a little interesting work belongs to the time of this chapter.

The most intrinsically interesting examples of Alliterative Romance[1]

[1] The greater part of the work mentioned in this chapter will be found in the following collections, some of which include much else. One or two pieces which occur by themselves will, as before, be noted later:—

(*a*) Pinkerton (J.). *Scottish Poems*, Edinburgh, 1792, which gives a version, with altered title, of the *Awntyrs of Arthur*.

(*b*) Laing (D.). *Ancient and Popular Poetry of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1822, and thrice reprinted since, including the *Pistyl of Susan* and the *Awntyrs*.

(*c*) Madden (Sir Frederick). *Sir Gawayne* (Bannatyne Club, 1839), giving *Gawayne and the Green Knight*, the *Awntyrs*, etc.

(*d*) Robson (J.). *Three Metrical Romances* (Camden Society, 1842), containing a third text of the *Awntyrs*.

(*e*) Amours (F. J.). *Scottish Alliterative Poems* (Scottish Text Society, 1897), containing the *Pistyl of Susan* and the *Awntyrs*.

Much of the introductory matter of these books is occupied with a discussion of the authorship of these poems, into which it is impossible here to enter fully, but of which so much has been made that a slight notice of it, with the present writer's own conclusions, may justly be expected. Wyntoun, the verse chronicler (*vide* Book iv.), dealing with a disputed point in Arthurian matters, cites a certain "Huchowne," describing him as "of the Awle Ryale," and saying that

> He made the great geste of Arthure,
> And the Awntyrs of Gawane,
> The Pistyl also of sweet Susane.

This has set the speculative commentators off at almost interminable score. Huchowne (Hutcheon, Huchon, the usual French accusative-diminutive of Hugh

are beyond doubt *Gawain and the Green Knight*[1] and *William of Palerne* or *William and the Werewolf*. The former may, like the latter, have had a French original, but none such is known, and it stands at the head of an interesting group of Gawain Romances, which it is not fantastic to associate with Cumbrian rather than Welsh or Armorican traditions, but which are certainly Celtic in character.[2] Of *Gawain* I have already observed that the identity of its author with him of the interesting *Pearl* group is not, according to my notions of literary evidence, proven; but it is not impossible. The poem consists of rather more than 2500 lines, in a curious irregular sort of stanza, consisting of an uncertain number (from sixteen to twenty), mostly unrhymed, unmetred, but somewhat dactylically rhythmed "four-accent" lines regularly alliterated, terminating with what Guest has made it usual to term a "bob and wheel," that is to say, a single-foot iambic and and an eight- or six-syllabled quatrain—the five-rhymed *ababa*. This scheme, which, with variations, is not uncommon, seems to show that some revivers of alliteration themselves felt that it could not be depended upon entirely alone—that it must be backed by the charms of metre and rhyme.

Gawain and the Green Knight.

Even in this poem, the best of its kind, the fatal danger of alliteration—that the selection, or at worst invention, of the "rhyme-words" is too often solely determined by their sound, not their sense—makes itself painfully felt. But the author's power is very much greater than that of most of his competitors in metre or in alliteration, and the story is one of singular interest and force. It opens with a few touches suggesting the very old and popular piece (also a Gawain

or Hugues) has been erected into a great poet of the thirteenth century, the earliest (or the earliest next to Thomas the Rhymer) of known Scottish poets, and has been endowed with all, or more, or fewer of such early alliterative poems as are known to be or may possibly be of his time, the amplest appanage including *Gawayne and the Green Knight*, the three alliterative religious pieces noticed at the end of chap. iii., the *Pistyl*, the *Awntyrs*, an alliterative *Morte d'Arthure*, also contained in the Thornton MS., and what not. In argument for and against this the stores of dialect, allusion, diction, and the like have been literally ransacked, with the most contradictory results. Those interested in the matter may be referred to the introductions in question. We may here safely say three things—(1) Nothing is known of "Huchowne" save from Wyntoun, and Wyntoun does not say whether he was Frenchman, Englishman, or Scot, nor in what language he wrote; (2) It is not impossible that he may have written some of the poems in question, especially the extant *Pistyl of Susan*, which (*vide infra*) is at least as old as 1380; (3) There is no evidence that he wrote this or any other

[1] Re-edited after Madden by Dr. Morris for the E.E.T.S.

[2] Gawain, unlike Lancelot, appears in the earliest handling of the story; and Welsh authorities always strive to put him above his rival. This is most curiously illustrated in the late Welsh version of the Graal story, *Y Seint Greal* (London, 1876).

one) of the *Chevalier au Lyon* or *Ywain*, but soon all resemblance ceases. Gawain (who in all this group, as in the earlier romances generally, is not represented as the light o' love that the French and Germans made him) undertakes, when others quail, the adventure of a perilous "Green Knight" who enters Arthur's hall unbidden and challenges any one to give him a buffet and bide one in turn. The king's nephew fetches a swashing blow with his battle-axe and beheads the knight clean, but the trunk picks the head up, mounts the green steed with it in hand, and departs, after the lips of the severed head have given Gawain his venue at the Green Chapel on New Year's Day twelvemonth. When the appointment draws near Gawain arms himself splendidly and rides alone through England to North Wales in quest of his doom. He is royally guested at a castle where the knight welcomes him warmly, and the lady even more so, and where he is told that the Green Chapel is close at hand. His host proposes a bargain—that they shall exchange whatever they gain in hunting or otherwise—and Gawain grants it. The host hunts with great success, but Gawain stays at home. He is tempted by the chatelaine, but resists so far as only to take a kiss. He keeps his word on receiving the host's game by giving him a kiss, though he will not (as indeed he need not) tell him where he got it. A second day witnesses the same events; but on the third the lady, who now very nearly overcomes the knight's steadfastness, forces on him her girdle, which has the virtue of making the wearer invulnerable. This temptation is too much for him when he thinks of his perilous adventure, and he takes it (with "kisses three") under promise of secrecy. Accordingly when swapping-time[1] comes he gives his host the kisses, but says nothing about the girdle. The reader anticipates the result. The host is the Green Knight, though not even at the last, when in his fantastic garb he meets Gawain and deals the deadly blow, does he reveal this. Gawain flinches ("shunts") at the first stroke, but manfully bides another, which only gives him a flesh wound. He draws his sword, prepared to fight it out as the wager is accomplished, but the knight leans calmly on his axe and reveals the truth. He and his wife agreed to tempt Gawain, who came out scatheless except in his acceptance, through caution, if not exactly cowardice, of the girdle-lace, and his failure to give it up according to compact. Therefore he saved his life, but lost his blood. The knight, Bernlac de Hautdesert (who is one of Morgane la Faye's), forgives him, gives him the lace, and all ends happily. The high and yet not mawkish morality of the piece is well matched by the telling, and the romance is certainly one of our very best.

[1] This is no slang—the word "swap" is in the text.

The still more curious, though as literature inferior, *Anturs* or *Awntyrs* (adventures) *of Arthur at the Tarne Watheling* (Tarn Wadling in Cumberland), but for its strong and regular alliteration, might have been put in the last chapter. For here the unrhymed *tirades* of the *Green Knight* become regular nine-lined stanzas, rhymed (rather imperfectly, it is true) *ababababc*. There is no "bob," but the "wheel" consists of a triplet and singleton rhymed *dddc*. The story opens in a strange and promising manner with the apparition to Gawain and the Queen of a specially loathly spirit, the ghost of Guinevere's mother, to give her good advice, and this is told with some power; but the romance then declines into an ordinary fight between Gawain and Sir Galleron of Galway. We have three texts of it in the Douce, Thornton, and Ireland-Blackburne MSS. respectively; and all three have been printed in the collections referred to in the note at the beginning of this chapter. The language is in no case "Scots"—indeed, as we shall see later, it could not be; but it is in all Northern, like that of almost the whole of the poems of this group, and in at least one form, that of the Ireland-Blackburne version, it is distinctly uncomely, not to say barbarous, though this rather suits the grisliness of the ghost.

The Awntyrs of Arthur.

William and the Werewolf or *William of Palerne*,[1] less original, so far as we know, than the *Green Knight*, but pretty freely adapted from its extant French model, is in plain and unadulterated "four-accent" verses, directly comparable with *Piers Plowman*, of the oldest version of which it may be ten or fifteen years the elder. The story of a missing heir fostered by a werewolf, who is himself the victim of machinations, is interesting, and the execution sometimes capital. Indeed, it is superior to the *Green Knight* itself in one point, the rejection of uncouth or manufactured words for the mere sake of alliteration.

William of Palerne.

Two important Arthurian poems, one certainly and the other very probably dating from this period, belong to the plain unrhymed and unstanza-ed variety of alliterative verse. One of these is on *Joseph of Arimathea*,[1] and the other is the long alliterative *Morte d'Arthure* of the Thornton MS., which has had its claims put in as the "great geste" of Huchowne. The date of this MS. is, as has been said, much later than our present period; but in view of its other contents this is no argument. The *Joseph* is contained in the Vernon MS., and therefore certainly ours here.

Joseph of Arimathea.

It is of no great length—about 700 lines—and does not seem,

[1] Ed. Skeat, E.E.T.S.

though it is incomplete, to have been ever much longer; it is only a paraphrase of the constantly reworked legend of its subject, and it has no special literary characteristics. Yet it has interest for us, like so much else, because it shows the set of the tide—not in this case the main set but an important "overfall"—in the alliterative direction, and the way in which the great "matters" of mediæval interest were being at the moment handled in England.

The Thornton *Morte d'Arthure*.

The alliterative *Morte d'Arthure*[1] is a much bigger thing, extending to over 4000 lines, and possessed of distincter literary character. It belongs in point of matter to what may be generally called the "Brut" rather than the romance type of the Arthurian story, and busies itself, like the older versions of that story generally, with the king's wars against the Romans chiefly, ignoring the more romantic, and even the more mystical, parts of the legend almost or altogether. But it is a vigorous piece, employing its somewhat rugged and clumsy implement of verse with a sort of sword- or rather axe-play which is refreshing and effective, and calling to its aid a vocabulary well suited to the subject and style, and sufficiently individual. Few will wish for a complete literature of such poems; but we could endure several more as good as this *Morte d'Arthure*.

The *Destruction of Troy*.

Among its actual companions it seems to have had pieces dealing with both the great classical subjects of mediæval romance, Alexander and Troy; but the alliterative poems on the first subject which can be probably referred to this period are but fragmentary.[2] It is otherwise with the great *Destruction of Troy*,[3] which we possess in plainly alliterated verse, and which is not impossibly older than 1400. This is a huge poem of over 14,000 lines, translated with a certain amount of freedom from the popular compilation on the subject by Guido Colonna, written in a Northern or North Midland dialect, and containing no sort of identification of author or time of composition, though attempts have been made to father it on the usual Huchowne. It is less rugged than the *Morte d'Arthure*, and a good deal less picturesque, though appearances are unfairly against the poet when he says in his penultimate line "Now the *proses* is put plainly to end," for he only means "process." On the whole, it is by no means unreadable, long as it is, and every now and then, in some of the interminable fighting, in some storm passages, in the account of the death of Ulysses at the hands of Telegonus, and in the Troilus and Briseida[4] episodes, the writer contrives to

[1] Ed. Perry, E.E.T.S. [2] See note at end of chapter.
[3] E.E.T.S., ed. Panton and Donaldson.
[4] The retention of this form of the name is perhaps an argument for an [1]v date. For by 1400 the authority of Chaucer would most probably have

acquit himself very fairly. But it does not compare well with its chief rival in the same "matter" on the metrical side, *King Alisaunder*.

And so we come to the *Pistyl of Susan*, one of the smallest in bulk, but, for reasons already given and others, one of the most remarkable. It is a versification of the pleasant piece of poetical justice which, as "not found in the Hebrew" of the Book of Daniel, was turned out from the Canon into the Apocrypha of the English Bible, but is still to be found there, and was, until recent tamperings with the Lectionary, regularly read as First Lesson at Even-song in the Church of England on 22nd November. The earliest version (there are four others dating from the fifteenth century) is found in the great Vernon MS. of the Bodleian Library, one of the hugest of its kind, containing some 800 very large pages filled with religious compositions, and put by experts at not later than 1380. The *Pistyl of Susan*.

Susan contains exactly 366 verses (a number perhaps not fortuitous) arranged in one of the varieties (the eight-line with bob and wheel) of the peculiar alliterated and rhymed stanzas already described. The alliteration is heavy—four alliterated words being often, and I think five sometimes, crowded into a not very long line. But it is very well managed, and the poem is distinctly above the average not merely of its class, but of mediæval verse generally. The author follows the Vulgate narrative closely as a framework, but amplifies and embroiders in the usual fashion, and occasionally breaks in with a completely original addition. The two chief of these (of unequal value) are one of the stock mediæval gardens, with apples and pomegranates, parrots and goldfinches as serenely mingled as in the *Swiss Family Robinson*, and a most beautiful stanza describing the parting of Susanna and her husband Joachim :—

> She fell down flat on the floor, her fere when she found,
> Carped [spoke] to him kindly, as she full well couthe (could) :
> "Iwis I thee wrathed never at my witand (witting),
> Neither in word nor in work, in eld nor in youth."
> She cowered up on her knees and kissed his hand—
> "For I am damned, I not dare disparage thy mouth."
> Was never more sorrowful segge (man) by sea nor by sand,
> Ne never a sorrier sight by north ne by south.
> Then there
> They took the fetters off her feet,
> And ever he kissed that sweet.
> "In other worlds shall we meet,"
> Said he no mair.

whelmed "Briseis" and "Briseida" once for all in "Cressid." Yet some think that Chaucer's *Troilus* is referred to.

Huchowne or no Huchowne, the man who wrote that was a poet in form and in fact. Nor does his dealing "disparage" the mouth of Daniel when that youthful prophet comes to judgment and addresses the elders (indeed they richly deserved it) in language of extreme directness.[1]

[1] *Note to Second Edition.*—The uncertainty of date as to the *Alexander* alliterative romances caused, in the first edition of this book, first, irresolution whether to notice them here or later, and then (by an accident, to which most writers in this kind have I suppose at some time or other fallen victims) the unintentional omission of any further notice of them. As at present accessible (the Scottish Text Society promises further publication) in the Roxburghe Club issues (ed. Stevenson), and in those of the E. E. T. S. (ed. Skeat), they consist of two short fragments and one long one. This latter (C. of Skeat, E. E. T. S. 1886) in the longest version extends to nearly 6000 lines of the usual character, giving the fabulous history of the hero from the usual starting-point of Nectanebus (see p. 89) to the Conquest of Babylon, and including the correspondence of Alexander and Dindimus (see p. 28 *note*). This also appears in one of the shorter fragments (B. of Skeat, E. E. T. S. 1878) while the other (A. of Skeat printed in his *William of Palerne*, E. E. T. S. 1867) deals with earlier parts of the story. None of the three exhibits remarkable poetical merit, and their authorship (plural or singular) though it has been discussed as usual, is quite unknown. The long poem is, however, interesting for comparison with the rhymed version noticed above; and, if inferior in some points, shows the superior *vigour*, as well as capacity, of the long alliterative line.

Note to Third Edition.—I observe that the short piece of *Chevalere Assigne* ("The Knight of the Swan," E.E.T.S. 1868) has also been overlooked. It is not wanting either in vigour or in pathos; but the alliterative verse is even less rhythmical than usual.

INTERCHAPTER II

THE incorrectness, or at least the insufficiency, of that view of literature and literary criticism which despises the historic estimate, and bids us look only to "the best and principal things," is perhaps nowhere illustrated in a more complete and damaging fashion than by the period of which I have endeavoured to give some account in the foregoing Book. With exceptions, rare in number and almost infinitesimal in proportional bulk, it contains nothing that can, by the widest inclusion and the kindliest judgment that retains critical competence, be described as "best" or "principal" in relation to literature at large. Whether even these exceptions—a lyric or two of the calibre of *Alison*, a passage here and there in Layamon and the Romances, the flashes of intensity in the author of *Cleanness*, the melancholy music of *The Pearl* and some of the Hampolian poems, the simple and pathetic parting of Susanna and Joachim quoted just now—whether even they reach the fringe of the best things may be questioned without excessive severity. Under a still lower and more accommodating standard this Early Middle English literature demands, in order to enjoy much of it as literature, a kind of pre-established harmony of taste in the reader, not a little acquaintance with other letters, and a certain though not a very great amount of patience and preparation in the mere rudiments. Every now and then, especially in the alliterative poems, the strange combination of elaborate pains and insufficient accomplishment or taste will positively disgust; in almost every case an impatient temper must know how to avoid, or a patient one how to endure, vast overdoses of ill-baked bread to a modicum of sack, vast stretches of literary desert to a few not always quite paradisaical oases.

And yet there is no portion of English literature the study of which can be wholly pretermitted with greater danger, none the study of which is repaid by greater increase of understanding, and even of enjoyment, in regard to the rest. It is desirable, no doubt, that the student—even that the reader, who, though he may not call himself a student, wishes to read intelligently—should read Angio-

Saxon literature; but it can hardly be said to be necessary. In certain points, and those of the most importance, some acquaintance with Middle English literature before Chaucer may be said to be an absolute necessity. Fortunately we now only preach to the converted when we insist on the necessity of understanding Chaucer in order to understand what follows him; before long, let us hope, it will be equally unnecessary to dwell much on the hopelessness of understanding Chaucer unless we have some understanding of what he followed.

Let us see, then, what the three hundred years which passed since the date of our last summary, in the first of these interchapters, had done for English literature, what they had put ready as accomplished facts for acceptance or rejection in the way of materials and in the way of tools for any one who felt the vocation of writing about, or a little after, the middle of the fourteenth century.

In the first place, though this concerns us least, and is moreover a now generally accepted fact, they had provided a language which, disguised a little by the occasional retention of obsolete forms of letters, by unsettled and capricious spelling, and by dialectic variations, possessing still a considerable number of obsolete words, and lacking as yet some of the terms of art and thought which the translators, and especially the prose writers, of the fifteenth century were to add, was to all intents and purposes English — not Old English, not Middle English, but English, with still a chip or fleck of shell in the shape of an inflection only half discarded upon it, but about to cast even these off. The notion of Chaucer as having flooded the language with French words in contradistinction to the sound Saxon vocabulary of his contemporary Langland died hard, and perhaps simulates life even yet; but its obstinacy in surviving is merely Partridgean.

If less general adhesion be given to the proposition that English metre was also, in the rough at least, fully created, that, I believe, is chiefly due to the much inferior attention which has been given to the subject. It is true that the formative period of prosody had not yet ceased, and that the genius of the four masters, Chaucer himself, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton (to whom it is perhaps but just to add Surrey and Marlowe), had to be applied before all the resources of English in this respect were at the command of whosoever chose—and chooses—to use them. It is true that at the actual time a revolt, and a rather formidable one, was being made by alliterative rhythm against metre. This went some way, and if Langland had had variety, flexibility, range, equal to his intensity—especially if he had had anything like Chaucer's command of phrase—it might have gone farther. But the truth is that alliteration, with its tyrannous restriction to the word which must be, not the word which ought to be, chosen,

is the deadly foe of phrase itself, and consequently of style, and could not have triumphed. On the other hand, English metrical writers themselves had to unlearn something and to learn much. They had to get rid of the final *e*, a live thing once, but now somewhat like a half-dead but not severed branch on a tree. They had to get rid of the superstition of the central pause, and of strict syllabic number, which they derived, though they fought against both, from their French models, and in the first case from the grasp of the "dead hand" of Anglo-Saxon itself. But 150 years at least of steady practice, of constant pressure of metrical form, on the yielding but by no means merely passive body of older rhythm, had got the poetical capacities of the language into real shape, had made not a merely mechanical junction, but a true graft. The octosyllable and decasyllable, with the trisyllabic variance in each, were already established, a crowd of ballad and romance combinations of eights and sixes was in existence, the rhymed, loose-pivoted line of the *Moral Ode* and Robert of Gloucester, with the unrhymed double stave of the alliterators, were ready between them to produce a family of metres of greater compass than the decasyllable—the Alexandrine, the iambic or trochaic fourteener, the tetrameter anapæstic. It is true that the actual production of these in any satisfactory form was postponed for a century and more; but that is merely one of the constant accidents of literary history, and we shall perhaps be able to give some explanation of it when we come to sum up the fifteenth century itself.

Of advance in the direction of kinds and subjects we have to speak with more reserves and allowances. In some cases there is even a falling back; thus Early Middle English is entirely destitute of the sound and valuable, if not extremely accomplished, original historic prose that we find in Anglo-Saxon. Indeed, in the whole domain of prose there is at best a stationary state, at most and more commonly a distinct decline. Nor is this in the least surprising. Prose is, far more than verse, a matter of practice and copying; and by the tenth century—the best age of Anglo-Saxon prose—that language had had experience plentiful in bulk and extensive in time, if a little restricted in kind. The disorganisation which necessarily attended the remaking of the language made this practice to at least some extent useless and obsolete, while there were no models for the new tongue except Latin, inasmuch as none of the modern vernaculars (except Icelandic) had any prose worth speaking of to give it. We shall indeed see that no really good English prose appeared till a long apprenticeship in translating Latin and French had supplied this want. Meanwhile, such prose as there was, was more than ever exclusively religious.

This meant in its turn that all new kinds and subjects, whether suitable or not, had to be treated in verse, and they were so treated. It has been often enough pointed out that, to compensate for its drawbacks, verse had at least one merit, that in a non-reading age it was better suited for reading or reciting aloud to others. At any rate, its predominance is an undisputed fact, and one on which it is not necessary to dwell. Homilies and paraphrases of the Bible, narrative historical and narrative fictitious, rudimentary science, political satire, anything and everything found a vehicle in verse of kinds nearly as various as the subjects, but with the skipping octosyllable or the swinging, if not yet very smoothly swinging, fourteener for preference. Much of this verse (and that not merely in the Romance section) is pleasant and profitable to read even now. But comparatively little of it can be said to be fully accomplished as literature, and almost the whole of it is pervaded by a characteristic not new (for it confronts us almost equally in Anglo-Saxon); not in the least surprising, for it was practically inevitable; but necessarily affecting the interest and merit of the whole in an unfavourable way.

This characteristic comes from the fact that the great majority of the literature of the period is certainly, and that all but an infinitesimal part of it is probably, not original literature at all but translation. It is true that translation was not then so entirely unoriginal a thing as it is—as it prides and boasts itself upon being—now. Unkind critics have suggested that at least one reason why the mediæval translator allowed himself such liberties was that he had not the scholarship to be faithful; kind ones may prefer to see in it at least something of native literary aspiration, and the desire not merely to tread in the exact footsteps of another. But what is certain is that in English and at this time really original writing—writing "out of a man's own head"—is so rare as to be, in important instances, almost unknown. When a man did not, as the enormous majority of the romance-writers and not a few others certainly did, merely translate more or less loosely a single precedent work, he either compiled from several or (as must have been the case with even the more original religious writers from him of the *Ancren Riwle* downwards) wrote on subjects which had been so frequently handled, and which had such a large stock of prescribed and expected commonplaces and common forms appertaining to them, that his work has almost the character of a translation, or at least compilation. Nothing is more singular, more characteristic, or more puzzling in mediæval literature than the immense mass of its additions to the literary stock of the world, not merely in mere bulk of writing, but in new themes, new touches, new handling of all sorts—contrasted with the almost impos-

sibility of attributing any large original increments of the kind to single persons. It is not made, it grows. The great Arthurian legend itself is only the crowning example of the kind. In a few years this passes from the barest and most unpromising scantlings first, and then from an ingenious but not specially poetical sham history like a hundred others, to the stateliest and most elaborate structure of romance that exists. And how, from whom, exactly when, exactly where all this comes nobody knows, though in the desperation of craving for knowledge men have constantly thought and asserted that they knew. Nor is this the only point of the kind in which the Middle Ages resemble the enchanted forests of which they were so fond. Nothing happens as it might be expected to happen: the land which pretty certainly furnished the materials of the legend does not furnish the language in which it is first told; the language decoys the investigator away from the real fatherland of the story. "Everything is somebody else's," as the pathetic-humorous complaint of later fiction has it.

Yet to those who can be content to acquiesce in ignorance of an authorship which is, after all, a matter of very little consequence, and in whom the artificial thirst for *Quellen*, for origins, does not master the natural one for the water or wine of literature, whether fresh-drawn from spring, fresh-pressed from grape, or transfused through a dozen vessels, provided only it be clear and well-tasted—there is little disappointment and much satisfaction in the literature, even the English literature, of this period. If the writers seldom absolutely created for themselves, they are as a rule careful never to leave any capital that may come into their hands entirely unimproved, if it be only by fresh borrowings and combinations. And it is perhaps not less reasonable and more fair to suspect that their additions were, in many cases at any rate, not borrowings at all but original gifts—that the creative fancy, too shy and distrustful of itself to go altogether alone, took its opportunity of exercise under cover and with the assistance of what existed already. At any rate, till we know to the contrary, there is no harm, for instance, in giving Layamon the credit of Argante and the elves; and if it should unluckily turn out after all that he does not deserve it, why, we can at worst transfer that credit to somebody else. The thing is important in literature, not the man.

Moreover, for those at least who are fortunate enough to take interest not merely in the thing, but in the way in which it is treated, the manner in which it is done, this Middle English period has plenty of attraction besides that chief one of prosody, which has been sufficiently brought out. Not only is the mere word-hoard regularly, if at first slowly, increasing, but the uses of it are

varying, multiplying, acquiring deftness and artistic value with every author and in every book. Here we have the rough draft of a word-play or a conceit familiar in Elizabethan writers. There we see (in a pamphlet published by Wynkyn de Worde, and translated from the French, it is true, but no doubt much older in both languages) an early form of the trap by which Goldsmith for once avenged himself on Johnson, and actually obtained an acknowledgment of his victory. Here again a familiar cadence in verse, there (it is true very rarely as yet) a memorable rhythm in prose, connects itself, for those who have the fortune to recognise the connection, with better things, or at least other things, to come. We are still in the workshop, and hardly any master workman has yet appeared, but *opus fervet* and the master himself is at hand.

BOOK III

CHAUCER AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

CHAPTER I

CHAUCER'S LIFE AND POEMS

Life—Probably spurious Tales—Other questioned work—The arguments for and against it—Admittedly genuine work—The three periods—The *Romaunt of the Rose*—The Minor Poems—*Troilus and Cressid*—The *House of Fame*—The *Legend of Good Women*—The *Canterbury Tales.*

IT was somewhat past the middle of the fourteenth century when the long process of incubation and experiment which we have followed from the cessation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to Hampole, Minot, and the revival of alliterative verse, culminated in a generation of positively accomplished, and in some cases positively known, poets and prose-writers. Chaucer is not the earliest of these; he is not, as is sometimes still openly said, and perhaps much more frequently thought, the only one worthy of attention. But he is by so much the greatest figure, that he deserves to give, as he has always given, name to the period, and to have precedence of those who, like Gower possibly, Langland, if Langland it was, and Wyclif pretty certainly, had the start of him in literary performance.

The life of Chaucer has for the greater part of a century had its full share of that touching, if not always intelligent, devotion which justifies the theory that the human race is not after all indifferent to its heroes. We know indeed very little about him that has even the slightest connection with literature; and we are bidden to give up the idea that he once beat a Franciscan friar in Fleet Street — which is picturesque and not impossible. We know that Cecilia de Chaumpaigne pardoned him or released him *de raptu meo;* but we have no portrait of Cecilia, we know

Life.

nothing about her, and there is no more interesting probability about the matter itself than that *raptus meus* was one of those abductions of heiresses for purely mercenary reasons which were extremely common in mediæval times and later, perhaps as late as the days and experiences of Henry Fielding. We know the pots of wine assigned as Chaucer's allowances, the details of his court suits as a page, and a great many other even less interesting details; but for the real Chaucer, the man, the poet, we are left to the poems [1] and our own imagination, being perhaps not the more unhappy therefor.

There is no positive evidence of the date of Chaucer's birth; for that of his death, 1400, we have not only tradition but the strong circumstantial proof that his pensions ceased to be paid at that time. The birth-date used to be fixed at 1328, and is now shifted to 1340, for reasons which must be sought in the biographies. The older date suits better with the acknowledged fact that Chaucer was an old man when he died; the new with most known circumstances of his life. He was pretty certainly the son of John and Agnes Chaucer, the former a citizen and vintner of London, who had a house in Thames Street. The separation between Court and City was not in mediæval days by any means sharp or total, and John Chaucer was not only a citizen and vintner, but held a post in the Royal Household which necessitated his accompanying King Edward and Queen Philippa to the Continent in 1338. Nor is there any doubt that Geoffrey Chaucer himself was in close and constant connection with the Royal Family.

The first link of this connection has been presumably found in some accounts for the household of Lionel, Edward's son, which record the provision of cloth, etc., and money allowances to a Geoffrey Chaucer in 1357. Two years later, he served in the army which invaded France, was taken prisoner, and ransomed in March 1360. In 1367 he had a pension of 20 marks as valet of the King's chamber. In 1370, 1372, 1377, and 1378 he was employed on diplomatic missions abroad, the second and fourth extending as far as Italy, with practically certain results on his literary work. We cannot find space here for the successive grants, from pitchers of wine to pensions, which he received for those and other services, with their cessations, restorations, diminutions, and augmentations, all which the biographers record to the uttermost farthing. The most important and interesting of these details are that in 1374 he received from the Corporation of London a lease for life of the gate-house at Aldgate, which he actually held for many years; and that a little

[1] Editions are extremely numerous; the standard library form is that of Professor Skeat's work (Clarendon Press), in six volumes, with a seventh containing what modern philological scholarship regards as the Chaucerian Apocrypha.

later he was appointed Comptroller of Customs in the port of London. His prosperity ebbed and flowed with that of the sections of the royal house to which he was more particularly attached, and was at its worst during the predominance of the Duke of Gloucester under Richard II. But though Chaucer was faithful to the latter, the accession of Henry of Bolingbroke did him no harm, as he had been attached of old to John of Gaunt. It seems that he probably died at Westminster, where he had taken a house not long before. He was certainly married; his wife pretty certainly died in 1387; and he had a son named Lewis, to whom in 1391 he very agreeably dedicated his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*. But his wife, whose name was apparently Philippa, is rather a shadowy personage, her identification as sister to Katherine Roet or Swinford, last wife of John of Gaunt, being rather probable than proved. Nor is there much positive evidence of Chaucer's formerly alleged connection with Woodstock or of his fatherhood of the Thomas Chaucer who became a person of wealth and importance later.[1] Nor is it superfluous to add a word of caution on the attempts made to take the personal descriptions in the Prologue to *Sir Thopas* as authentic. Nothing apparently will cure commentators of this rashness, not even the diminutive figure which Thackeray has subjoined to his own pretty faithful delineation of the face of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. What manner of man Chaucer was mentally we can see with infallible certainty from his work; what he was physically is quite unimportant and utterly uncertain, though there is a fair chance that the so-called Occleve portrait, occurring in a MS. of that writer's work, may be genuine.

On the work itself (and in this case much more reasonably) infinite pains have also been spent; but here also we meet with difficulties. There was, of course, in Chaucer's time no regular "publication" of literature; and not only in that time, but for long afterwards, precise dating of work was an exception and an accident, while precise attribution of it was rarer still. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, both in MSS. and early printed copies, a very heterogeneous mass of material came to pass under Chaucer's name. This mass, which it has been the business of the last century to sift, may be conveniently found in Chalmers's *Poets*, and it may, stopping short for the moment of all controversial matter whatever, be divided into four classes:—

[1] At the same time, it is not to be too lightly rejected, for the authority is Thomas Gascoigne (the author of the *Liber Veritatum*, partly edited by the late Mr. Thorold Rogers), who was born but a year or two at most after Chaucer's death, was later Chancellor of Oxford, in which University he resided almost all his life, and was a man interested in letters, inquisitive, and usually well-informed.

I. What is certainly, or so probably as to amount to certainty, Chaucer's.

II. What is certainly not Chaucer's.

III. What, on grounds which can be admitted by strictly literary and comparative criticism, is probably not Chaucer's.

IV. What, on grounds doubtful to such criticism, has been rejected by some.

With the matter contained in the second class, such as Lydgate's *Tale of Thebes* and Henryson's *Testament of Cressid*, we need not trouble ourselves. It never had any business where it was, and such of it as deserves notice will have that notice elsewhere. The third division, though containing some interesting work also, may be briefly dismissed. The *Tale of Gamelyn*, a capital ballad-romance in rough but spirited eights and sixes, containing a version of the story on which Shakespeare founded *As You Like It*, is the best of the division and an excellent thing. But neither metre, language, dialect, style, nor anything else about it is in the very slightest degree Chaucerian. It belongs distinctly to the class of poetry which, whether he contemned it or not, he certainly eschewed ; and it could only be his as a literary *tour de force* entirely out of character with the age. So too the less excellent *Plowman's Tale*, in eight-lined stanzas of eights rhymed *ababbcbc*, though less good than the *Gamelyn*, is equally or even more un-Chaucerian. It is a half-mystical satire, evidently written by some one who had both Chaucer and Langland before him, and who chose to throw the matter (as far as he could catch it) of the one into the form (as far as he could conceive it) of the other. Here again Chaucer could only have written the thing as a *tour de force*, as a kind of parody, in the spirit of the nineteenth, or at farthest back of the eighteenth, century, not of his own time. The *Tale of Beryn*, or *Second Merchant's Tale*, with its Prologue *The Pardoner and The Tapster*, is un-Chaucerian in metre rather than in character, but the external attribution to Chaucer is late and weak.

Probably spurious Tales.

The case is very different with another class of work, which, unlike this last, passed the vigilant and eminently literary scrutiny of Tyrwhitt, but has during the past generation been black-marked owing to the operation of a class of argument which was, I believe, started by the late Mr. Henry Bradshaw, and which has been perfected by Dr. Skeat. The power of literary, or at least bibliographical, divination which Mr. Bradshaw possessed does not seem to have been exaggerated, any more than the "magnetic" force of his personal character. And it is impossible for any one who has the slightest knowledge of the immense erudition and the unwearied kindness of the now late

Other questioned work.

Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge to speak of him with disrespect. Further, there is the difficulty that the class of argument in question, itself resting on extremely minute points of linguistics, phonetics, and other "sciences of the border," as we may perhaps call them, seems to demand an equal specialism from those who would attempt to meet it. Yet the criticism which would exclude from the Chaucerian canon such things not merely as the *Court of Love* and *The Flower and the Leaf*, but in whole or in part the existing English version of the *Romance of the Rose*, which we know that Chaucer did translate, cannot be allowed to pass quite unchallenged by those whom it does not satisfy.[1]

This criticism rests, as I understand it, upon two points—alleged differences of language, which, in the *Court of Love* especially, is said to be much later than Chaucer's time; and still more, alleged differences of rhyme. Few can lay much real stress on such arguments as that *The Flower and the Leaf* must have been written by a woman because the supposed narrator is addressed as "daughter"—an argument which would prove, among ten thousand other agreeable absurdities, that *Fatima* was not written by the author of *Locksley Hall*, and that Sir David Lyndsay was a four-legged creature.

It is said more seriously that Chaucer in his certain works never rhymes such a word as *grene*, in which the final *e* still existed, to such a word as *been*, where it was not; that he never rhymes *y* and *ye*, and so forth. And upon pleas of the kind an injunction against ticketing the incriminated poems as even possibly Chaucer's has been sought, and commonly taken as granted.

This question, of course, cannot here be argued at length, but it is far too important to be passed over altogether. And as similar arguments, *mutatis mutandis*, are applied to much interesting work of others before the Restoration, I may be allowed briefly to state three demurrers, in ascending order of what seems to me cogency, which justify, again as it seems to me, suspension of judgment in all the cases where these arguments are brought.

The arguments for and against it.

A. The first and weakest (being merely *ad homines*, but still stronger than others) is that the black-markers should agree a little better among themselves. The English *Rose*, for instance, has been split up, and the very parts which are granted to Chaucer by one critic

[1] It does not seem necessary to dwell on all the Apocrypha, many of the pieces having very small interest. *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* has a little, chiefly from its possible connection with *The Owl and the Nightingale*, and its possible influence on Milton's first sonnet later. It is now attributed by the Separatists to one Sir Thomas Clanvowe.

on these principles are denied to him by another. A calculus which brings out contradictory results is not quite a calculus to accept without reservation.

B. The second and much stronger is that the malcontents practically beg the question. They exclude certain work from consideration to get at Chaucer's rhymes; they draw an inference from the remainder; and then they argue back to the excluded parts and declare them not genuine, when they have not themselves been allowed to give evidence. We might as well exclude the "classical" experiments in the appendix to *Enoch Arden*, because there is no trace of such scansion in the mass of Tennyson's voluminous work.

But the third argument, and by far the strongest of all, is this:—

C. If a poem be in metre, rhyme, or language distinctly *older* than its alleged author's time, then it may fairly be pronounced not his, unless the habits of the age permit the supposition of deliberate archaism. But if it be *younger*, no argument can be founded upon that fact alone, because copyists may always have been responsible for the modernisation. And as a matter of fact we have but *one* MS. for the *Court of Love* and *none* for *The Flower and the Leaf*—facts of which the importance cannot be exaggerated.

These arguments do not appear to me to have received sufficient answer, and they are therefore put on record here, with the caution that I do not by any means assert that Chaucer wrote the English *Rose*, or *The Flower and the Leaf*, or the *Court of Love*. There is not evidence enough for that.[1] Moreover, Chaucer can do more than well without the poems, and the poems are quite pretty enough to stand by themselves.[2] If *The Flower and the Leaf* is middle fifteenth century, the *Court of Love* early sixteenth, as the prevailing opinion holds, supported by at least a general consensus of the chief authorities in the philological treatment of English, then there are two unknown English poets of those two dates who have each left nothing else, and who were not every-day poets.

The works which, by the severest modern criticism, are left as indisputably Chaucer's are as follows:—

[1] There is even evidence, of a much stronger kind than that on which the Separatists rely, against it. For instance, it may fairly be questioned whether Chaucer would have compared grass to "green wool," as the author of *The Flower and the Leaf* is made to do. He was the less Chaucer for the time if he did.

[2] *The Flower and the Leaf* is put by the Separatists about 1440, in the dead waste and middle of the night of English poetry; the *Court of Love* at about 1500, when that night saw only the broken dreams of Hawes and the cockcrow of Skelton, or about 1530, still before dawn.

A translation (whether it be in whole, in part, or in no part, that still existing) of the *Roman de la Rose.*

A considerable body of Minor Poems, original and translated—*The Book of the Duchess*, *The Complaints of Mars and Venus*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, *An(n)elida and Arcite*, with about a score of short pieces, ballads, and what not. Admittedly genuine work.

The House of Fame.

The Legend of Good Women.

Troilus and Cressid.

The Canterbury Tales.

Besides the prose translation of *Boethius* and the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, which will be dealt with in the next chapter but one.

Further, an ingenious, and by no means improbable, though not absolutely certain, theory has divided all this work into three *Periods*—in the first of which, represented by the *Romaunt of the Rose* and most of the minor poems, French influence predominates; in the second of which this is exchanged for Italian, as shown in *Troilus* (adapted from Boccaccio), the *House of Fame* (at least possibly suggested by Dante), and the first draft of the *Knight's Tale* (again from Boccaccio); while in the third, of which the *Canterbury Tales* are the great outcome, the poet, except for themes and motives merely, discards all foreign influence and becomes substantially English, though retaining his literary scholarship, both in the modern literary tongues, French and Italian, and the ancient, his proficiency in the latter as far as Latin is concerned being very considerable, and extending not merely to the compilations of the Dark and Middle Ages, but to a very fair share of the Classics proper. This arrangement corresponds very well with the known procession of the facts of Chaucer's life and with the probabilities of the case, but it is, to use the word which Mr. Matthew Arnold godfathered in English, "facultative," it can be taken or left; the examination of the work itself is necessary. The three periods.

The translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, though it is incomplete and stops far short of the enormous length of the French original, yet extends to the very respectable number of 7700 lines, in octosyllabic couplets. One great literary reason for accepting it as Chaucer's lies in the nature and conduct of these octosyllables. We have seen that, as was unavoidable, they were early imitated from French, and were for some time the favourite romance-metre, though they gradually gave place to more complicated arrangements, especially the six- or twelve-lined stanza, with sixes at regular intervals between the eights. Before Chaucer, however, the octosyllabic couplet, in its stricter form, had not been well mastered by English writers, who either availed themselves more or less of the license of

equivalence (which at its full stretch gives us the *Christabel* rhythm) or else fell, as indeed most French mediæval writers themselves fell, into a *staccato* stiffness on the one hand or an over-fluent and insignificant sing-song on the other. We shall find that Chaucer's exceedingly ingenious and scholarly contemporary Gower did not avoid this latter danger. But in the English *Romaunt of the Rose* a distinct command of the measure is observable, not indeed quite to the same extent as in the probably later *House of Fame* (one of the capital examples of the metre in English), but sufficiently like that and sufficiently unlike others to justify the attribution of the two to the same hand. Fortunately the English includes the whole of the first part of the original —that written by William of Lorris—and it renders very well the exquisite touch of that original, uniting as it does the languid charm of moonlight and dream with the fresh vividness of morning and movement. Nor need we very bitterly regret the loss of a version of the far more prosaic pedantries and pleasantries of Jean de Meung.

The *Romaunt of the Rose.*

Of the Minor Poems, all display in various ways the learning, and in different stages and degrees the accomplishment of language and metre, which make Chaucer so delightful, while some have interest certain or probable of a biographical or historical kind. The *Book of the Duchess*, for example, which is certainly on the death of Duchess Blanche of Lancaster, first wife of John of Gaunt, gives us a date—she died in 1369—and has been — on the 1340 theory of the poet's birth — plausibly enough conjectured to be one of his earliest works, the *Complaint of Pity* (which appears to enshrine some unlucky love affair) being perhaps earlier still. The *Book* is in octosyllables much less perfect than those of the *Romaunt*, and evidently the work of a novice, while its substance is rather clumsily made up of classicism and allegory in the less happy manner of the *Rose* itself. *Chaucer's A B C* (a sort of acrostic in which each stanza opens with a letter of the alphabet in order) is said to have been written for the same Blanche. These stanzas are eight-lined (*ababbcbc*), religious in tone, and of no great poetical merit. Much better in the eyes of literature, if not in those of morality, are the *Complaints of Mars and Venus.* In the first, and probably in both, the well-known story is applied to personages who are pretty certainly identified with John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon and Duke of Exeter, and Isabel of Castile, daughter of Peter the Cruel, and wife of Edmund Duke of York, son of Edward III. Isabel was more famous for beauty than for strict propriety of conduct. But there is no open attribution in the poem, and the "Venus" part at any rate was translated or adapted from a French original by Otes de Granson. The *Complaint of Pity*, *Queen*

The Minor Poems.

Annelida, and the *Parliament of Fowls* are all mainly in the seven-lined stanza *ababbcc*, which was Chaucer's favourite among these combinations, and which acquired the name of rhyme-royal perhaps from that circumstance, though the usual explanation is that it was because of the use of the stanza in the *King's Quair*.

Of these three poems, the *Complaint*, though the least accomplished in form, is genuine in tone; and *Queen Annelida*, though ostensibly fiction, rings as of a personal sorrow. But the *Parliament* or *Assembly of Fowls* is by far the best of the three, and indeed of all the minor poems. Here in the very opening—

> The life so short, the craft so long to learn,
> The essay so hard, so sharp the conquering,
> The dreadful joys alway that flit so yerne [eagerly],
> All this mean I by love—

we feel at once the grip, the thrill, the sense of mastery and mystery which are so rare in earlier poetry. And the rest of the piece, which some would have to show already Italian influence, announces Chaucer quite unmistakably in the catalogue of trees afterwards copied by Spenser—

> The builder oak and eke the hardy ash—

and that other of the birds themselves. These catalogues he was fond of applying afresh in various forms and matters, and they display his then unexampled, and seldom since approached, still seldomer outdone, faculty of making the epithet fit the noun, and transforming the bald enumerations which are one of the curses of mediæval poetry into broad and varied examples at once of keen observation and masterly expression.

The smaller poems do not seem to require any very special notice. Some of the ballads, such as the newly recovered one *To Rosamond*, are pretty; the late and sad *Flee from the Press* has dignity and truth; and others are interesting. But Chaucer, who was for so great a poet curiously deficient in strictly lyrical gift, shows better in long poems than in short, and better in narration than in reflection. Indeed, it is scarcely wrong to say that, as regards the tone and substance of his work, he is rather a dramatist and a novelist than a poet, though he applied to the subjects which, there being as yet no novel and no play, he treated in poetic form, an unsurpassed and rarely equalled power of poetic expression. His expression is the expression of the poet; his thought the thought of the dramatist or novelist.

Hence it is—a matter rare and certainly not to be grumbled at—that, as has been just remarked, his long poems are better than

his short. In the long poems of his supposed middle period he was indeed still hardly out of leading-strings—or rather he chose to wear them, for *Troilus and Cressid* is translation in little more than name, the *House of Fame* owes nothing more than hints to its original, and the *Legend of Good Women* handles the classical stories, which it takes chiefly from Ovid, with nearly as much freedom as that shown in the *Canterbury Tales* themselves.

Troilus and Cressid.

Each of the three has a charm of its own, and *Troilus* has the additional one of forming a link in a chain of writing on the same subject by a succession of writers all eminent in the history of literature, and most of them possessing far more than merely historical importance. The figure of Cressida (Briseida, Griseida, etc.), which the trouvère Benoît de Sainte-More had extracted from the dustbin of Dares and had partially, but only partially, vivified, passed, a very little further modernised, into the *Historia Trojana* (mostly pillaged from Benoît) of Guido Colonna or delle Colonne at the end of the thirteenth century. Hence Boccaccio in his *Filostrato*, applying his genius as a novelist and his talent as a poet, took Cressid, but made her something far more interesting than the passive love-thrall of Benoît. Chaucer, in turn taking her from Boccaccio, softened and complicated her traits a little, but added to the story the wonderfully vivid and individual figure of Pandarus. Chaucer's Scottish follower, Henryson, not meddling with his master's actual matter, completed the story unequally, but with marvellous touches in parts, by the *Testament of Cressid* in the fifteenth century; Shakespeare in the sixteenth dramatised, with variations, the Chaucerian part; and Dryden in the seventeenth refashioned Shakespeare. Perhaps there is no other instance in literary history of so many persons of such distinction taking and handing on the same torch so long. Nor need we hesitate to give Chaucer's own contribution to the series the credit of the most accomplished long poem yet written in English. The rhyme-royal stanzas are thoroughly beaten out; the passionate side of Cressid's character is fully developed, yet with a delicacy which is not always associated with the idea of Chaucer; the comic, and yet not farcical presentation of Pandarus is the first of its kind in English; and the scene where the lovers are made happy, though somewhat too much elaborated (as indeed is the whole poem) with the "Court of Love" scholasticism of the time, is a masterpiece. Nothing but want of technical originality and a certain absence of incident could be charged against *Troilus*, and the first of these charges, as we have seen, is more formally than really true.

The *House of Fame*, a much shorter poem, in rather more than 2000 lines of octosyllabic couplet, adds to the presentation of

Chaucer as master by this time of whatsoever metre he chose to adopt, and strengthens the suggestion (already given by Pandarus) of his peculiar and hitherto unexampled humour. The piece is one of the dreams, curiously compounded of learning, satire, and other things, which flowed from the never-failing fountain of the *Rose* for some three centuries; and it affords opportunity for much shrewd criticism of life. But the most Chaucerian touches of all, perhaps, are put in the mouth of the eagle who carries the poet up to Heaven to see the House. This eagle is a very humorous as well as powerful fowl, and his remonstrances with the wriggling bard at his being so "noyous" to carry, together with his cool, dry comfort and reassurance against any danger of his burden's being made cupbearer to the Gods, or "stellified" or otherwise inconveniently honoured, exhibit the English thing called Humour in almost as full development as the *Canterbury Tales* themselves. The *House of Fame*.

The *Legend of Good Women*, besides the general interest of all Chaucer's verse, besides its own intrinsic attraction (for the "good women" are the most hapless and blameless of Ovid's *Heroides*), and the remembrance of its suggestion of what is perhaps, all things considered, the most perfect example of Tennyson's verse,[1] has the additional charm of presenting to us Chaucer's first experiment in the heroic couplet, the main pillar, with blank verse, of later English poetry, and the medium of his own greatest work. The faint foreshadowings of this in earlier verse, the ways in which the uncertain crystallisation of our prosody now takes this form, now loses it again, have been already indicated. But, as is generally the case when a poet of the first genius hits upon a metre of the first importance, the thing, after being almost unbodied, certainly embryonic, in its first appearance, presents itself practically full-grown. The pathetic subjects of the *Legend* do not indeed give the author much opportunity for showing that marvellous suitableness of the form for comic portraiture and description which the *Canterbury Tales* display. But it is noticeable that he opens the collection with one of those ironic or agnostic, rather than positively sceptical, references to things beyond the present life which are found elsewhere (*e.g.* in the *Knight's Tale*), and which indeed may be said without paradox to form not so much a reaction from the piety of the Middle Ages as a complement or even an integral part of it. After this and The *Legend of Good Women*.

[1] I read, before my eyelids dropt their shade,
"*The Legend of Good Women*," long ago
Sung by the morning star of song, who made
His music heard below.
A Dream of Fair Women.

some of that passionate praise of the Daisy which, common as it is in fourteenth and fifteenth century poetry, always, or almost always, hides or discloses affection for some living Margaret, one of the usual allegorical overtures (here specially interesting because it refers to the poet's own works) conveys a rebuke to him from the God of Love and Alcestis his servant for the sacrilegious remarks contained in the *Rose* and in *Troilus*. So he undertakes a palinode, and tells in turn of Cleopatra and her faithfulness to Antony, of Thisbe and Dido, of Hypsipyle and Medea, how true they were to the false Jason, of Lucrece, Ariadne, Philomene (Philomela), Phillis, and Hypermnestra —all examples of truth, deserved or undeserved, in woman. It is pleasant, as it always is, to receive the old classical stories set out with the new romantic charm, but the chief attraction of the poem is the new-born metre—the strength, command, and freshness which Chaucer shows in it, his penetration at once of the secrets of *enjambement* or overlapping, of paragraph arrangement, of the merits of a full stop at the end of the first line of a couplet, his mastery of lift and swing, the eddying internal swirl, and yet the constant onward progress of his whole rhythm.

The most like in tone to the *Legend* of all the minor poems are the chief "doubtfuls," the *Court of Love* and *The Flower and the Leaf*, though they are in the Chaucerian stanza or rhyme-royal, not in heroics, and though the *Court of Love* expresses the libel as well as the palinode. It is difficult to say which of the two is the more charming—the *Court of Love* with its statutes half ironical, half passionate, and the delightful concert of the birds at the end, with their amorous descants founded on psalm-motives ; or the dreamlike vision of *The Flower and the Leaf*, with the white and green parties of Diana and Flora, and the fantastic allegory of a not extravagant virginity. Of the two, the sentiment is the more Chaucerian in the *Court of Love*, the expression and arrangement in *The Flower and the Leaf*. Perhaps the best argument for the non-Chaucerian authorship is that if they be later they take away the almost unintelligible reproach of England during the ensuing century.

There is, however, no doubt that common fame has even more than that measure of reason which (to do her the justice too seldom done) she often, though not always, has in such cases in considering Chaucer as the poet of the *Canterbury Tales*. In these we have not only his most considerable work (even if the English *Rose* be wholly his) in bulk ; not only his latest ; not only work which includes in one part or another of it all the merits and beauties which can be discerned elsewhere, but work displaying a variety and a vigour nowhere else to be found, as well as evidences of original genius which do not appear even in the best of

The *Canterbury Tales*.

the other works. Although the *Decameron* may have furnished the bare suggestion of alternate tale-telling, although many, perhaps most, of the tales are founded in subject, and even in some details of treatment, on previous work, classical, Italian, or French, yet the whole as a whole is distinctly "new and original" in a very different sense from that of the play-bills. The entire framework, and very much of the inset tales, is studied directly from the English life of the time: the gracious lunar rainbows of the *Rose* have given place to sunlight; the abstractions of scholastic philandering retire in favour of beings of flesh and blood. For Dangier and Bialacoil, even for Cressid, the fair, frail type, and Troilus, the *amoureux transi* of all time, we have the bouncing Wife of Bath and the mincing Prioress, the stout carle of a Miller, and the Summoner as full of reality as he is wanting in delicacy. Even the pieces like the famous *Knight's Tale*, which, like the earlier poems, are taken from others, and deal with literary tradition rather than with English contemporary fact, wear a new guise and breathe a new spirit. We pass from convention to direct impression and expression, from pageantry to conduct, from allegory to fact. There is not less art; there is, in fact, more art than ever, but there is infinitely more matter, and the matter and the art have not the slightest difficulty in joining hands.

We must neglect as usual, or at least notice only by reference, a great deal of the matter which a praiseworthy zeal has accumulated in reference to the *Canterbury Tales*. It is evident on the face of it that they were not finished, and it is very probable that the successive instalments were never arranged even in a provisional order by the author. Industrious editors have accordingly, by the help of the Prologue, the interspersed introductions, and other real or imaginary hints, regrouped the tales, calculated how many more were to be told, and adjusted the stages of the journey. This is good matter for whoso likes it; whoso does not, may neglect it without scathe or demur. It is, however, not unimportant to bear in mind that, as the sure evidences of style and metre show, the book represents work of very different periods, and probably includes not a little which was originally composed without a distinct view to the whole scheme as we have it.

The simplest literary facts, as distinguished from what classical scholars call "hariolations," are that the *Canterbury Tales* consist of about seventeen thousand and odd lines of verse, and two pieces, the *Tale of Melibee* and the *Parson's Tale*, of prose, the former having, in parts, odd indications or remnants of blank verse in it. The poetical part is, with the exception of the burlesque romaunt of *Sir Thopas*, either in rhymed couplets of the kind just described or

in stanza. It is divided in point of matter into a prologue, which describes the cavalcade of the Pilgrims to the shrine of Becket, and depicts each in a series of wonderful vignettes or kit-cat portraits. There are, besides *Sir Thopas* and the two prose tales, twenty-one tales in verse of very different lengths, ranging from the two thousand lines of the *Knight's Tale* to mere fragments like the *Cook's*. Between the Tales there are lesser prologues which keep up the framework, and very commonly, if not invariably, display the dramatic power of the author, and his intensely vivid observation of contemporary life at their highest. In point of subject, the Tales now vary in the widest and freest manner. The *Knight's Tale* is a regular romance of chivalry, not on the smallest scale, and belonging to the antique matter. So is the *Man of Law's Tale*, which handles in rhyme-royal a variant of the story of Emarè (p. 96). So is the *Clerk's*, which tells the story of Griselda (rhyme-royal); the *Squire's*, which "leaves half told The story of Cambuscan bold." The Prioress, the Monk, and the Nun tell legends of Saint Cecilia, of Hugh of Lincoln (not *eo nomine*), or stories of Scriptural or classical lore. All the rest are *fabliaux* of one kind or another—that is to say, Englishings, in the most original and least second-hand fashion, of the peculiar verse-stories, often, but not always, distinctly "free" in incident and language, and almost always containing a more or less satirical criticism of life, which had become popular in France about two centuries before.

The prologues are equally various in length and in immediate subject, though the tone is pretty much the same in all. The longest, the most famous, and on the whole the happiest, is the celebrated discourse of the Wife of Bath, which suggested Dunbar's only less brilliant (though more bitter) *The Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo*, and which, like it, is bitter satire on women put into the mouth of a woman, and arranged there with the curiously artful faculty of making the speaker unconsciously a self-satirist. All these prologues are full of direct and personal touches, and, with their prior, the opening piece, contain such a gallery of pictures from the life as no mediæval writer had ever attempted. The last Shakespearian touch—that which at once makes a character personal and individual for all time, and conveys to it the abiding characteristics of humanity which belong to no time in particular—is indeed not quite Chaucer's. His characters are rather astonishingly brilliant types, individualised by the freshness and sharpness of the impression, than absolutely individual persons. It was indeed almost impossible, till the clutch of allegory had been finally shaken off, that the complete tyranny of the type should be shaken off likewise. But no poets' characters that still partake of the type are so free from its drawbacks and blemishes as Chaucer's;

and many as are the great English humorists who have followed him, hardly one has succeeded in making more out of humour. This naturally shows itself in the comic tales and in the prologues, but it is not absent anywhere—not in the stately chivalry of the *Knight's Tale*, not in the pathos of the stories of Constance and Griselda.

Next to this almost omnipresent humour the great feature of the *Canterbury Tales* is the extraordinary vividness and precision of the presentment of images, whether complicated or simple. Of the former, the poem bears in its very forefront—in the figures of the prologue and the temple-descriptions of the *Knight's Tale*—unsurpassed instances. And in such phrases as the famous

> Smiler, with the knife under the cloak,

we meet, and meet almost for the first time, that gift of putting *multum in parvo* which only the greatest men of letters, perhaps in perfection only the greatest poets, possess. Pursuing this faculty still closer, we can bring it down, in at least some instances, to that unsurpassed power of making the epithet suit the noun which has been noticed already. It is evident, and interestingly evident, that this magical power of Chaucer's own words impressed, as it deserved to impress, his contemporaries and scholars more than anything else. His astonishing command of "rhetorique" (which the next age unluckily endeavoured to rival by searching for the most "aureate" words instead of the most appropriate), his "gold dewdrops of speech," were then the things that struck them most. It is true that, even in the *Canterbury Tales*, he has not quite escaped the curse of the *cliché*, of the expletive. But he has it far less than his predecessors, and often for long passages he escapes it altogether.

Lastly (for even Chaucer must be handled summarily here), we perceive in the *Canterbury Tales* the completion of his command of verse. On the subject of this verse there are many opinions, which often depend on preconceived theories. The old seventeenth- and eighteenth-century notion that he could not scan is, of course, now held by no instructed person. But there are some who hold that Chaucer allowed himself nine-syllable lines, and others, or the same, that he adhered to a strictly decasyllabic basis, as, it is pretty certain, his immediate successors tried (in their floundering attempts to follow him) to do. My own opinion is that, although Chaucer had not, as till after the great dramatic period it was practically impossible for any man to do, realised the full powers of equivalence in the English decasyllable, and the full advantage derivable from extending the license of pause to every place, he had yet made great strides in this direction. I believe that wherever only nine syllables, even with the

final *e*, occur, there is probably a fault in the reading ; that there are occasional Alexandrines ; and that, although in many instances "the" or "to" was intended to coalesce with a succeeding initial vowel, there are also instances of unquestionable trisyllabic feet. I am quite sure that the balance of the verse is managed with an almost (not perhaps a complete) freedom from that prejudice about the middle pause which, derived from the antediluvian prosody of Anglo-Saxon, and accidentally strengthened by the cæsura of French and Latin verse, weighed even upon some Elizabethans, and has never been entirely shaken off by a few, even among artists and scholars in verse, to the present day. And I am sure also that this mobile and sensitive prosody is the second, just as the inexhaustible freshness and propriety of his phrase is the first, great secret of the fact that Chaucer is the earliest English poet who can, without reservations and allowances, be called great, and, what is more, one of our greatest, even to the present day.

Note to Fifth Edition.—Further prosodic study has converted me to something like certainty as to the *fact* of the nine-syllable line in Chaucer ; though it is dangerous to dogmatise on his reasons for the use of it.

CHAPTER II

LANGLAND AND GOWER

Piers Plowman—Argument of the B Poem—Gower—The *Confessio Amantis*—Gower's reputation

ALMOST exactly contemporary with Chaucer were two other poets, both of more than ordinary mark—one of them Chaucer's own equal, if not superior, in intensity, though far his inferior in range and in art, both curious contrasts in more ways than one with him, and with each other. The first was the author of the *Vision of Piers the Plowman;* the second was John Gower.

The now generally accepted identification of the first with William Langley or Langland (the latter being the preferred form) rests on no very definite evidence, but it has fair probability in its favour. And the adoption of it (with a caution) saves us from the inconvenience of constantly using a clumsy periphrasis for a person who will have to be often named. It is well, however, to stop short of the further adventurousness of identifying all the personal details that can be got out of the *Vision* with Langland himself—of giving him a wife named "Kitty," and a daughter named "Calote" (Colette? Nicolette?), of placing him in London, of conferring on him those minor orders which did not necessarily comport celibacy, and so forth. Once more the "prosaic heresy," as we may conveniently call that which takes poetic and dramatic utterances for statements of biographical fact, is to be sedulously eschewed. The allusion to Malvern Hills in the opening of all versions of the poem is less questionable, though it is even here to be observed that the famous and almost proverbial extent of the view therefrom would make it a fitting imagined scene for the sort of survey of England which was coming. But fair presumption, though not certainty, may be drawn from the facts that the varying legends about Langland's birth locate it either at Cleobury Mortimer in Shropshire, or at Wychwood in Oxfordshire, both of which, though at opposite sides, may be said

to be in the remoter Malvern precincts, and that the dialect of the poem is said to be West Midland.

Its extreme popularity is shown by the great number of MSS. which remain of it,[1] and by the earliness, if not the number, of the printed editions.[2] It went out of favour in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, neither more nor less than other books of its kind and time; but it was recalled to attention rather earlier than most of them by Whitaker's edition (1813), the *editio princeps* of the "C" or longest text. Not, however, till the more thorough study of it during the last thirty years, in which Professor Skeat has been the main worker, was it discovered that this "C" text was not the only variant on the accepted or "B" text which had up to that time been printed.[3] There are, in fact, three families of MSS., comparison of which has established, as fairly as such things can be established, the fact that the poem was rehandled by its author with remarkable thoroughness at two separate times after the appearance of the first version; that that first version itself was not the *receptus* or B, but an earlier, shorter A; and that this earliest version, from allusions in it, may very probably have been written as early as 1362. The B or main text is similarly assigned to 1377 or thereabouts, and the C or longest to 1393, or thirty years after text A. Yet further, if Langland was, as seems extremely likely, the author of the alliterative poem on the deposition of Richard II., which Dr. Skeat calls *Richard the Redeless*, he must have been alive in 1399. This would give him a literary life of not much less than forty years, and assuming, as we may fairly do (for there are no marks of extreme juvenility even in the first version), that he was about thirty when he wrote it, this would carry his life from about 1330 to about 1400. The latter, it is to be remembered, is the year of Chaucer's death pretty certainly, while if the first version of *Piers Plowman* dates

Piers Plowman.

[1] The "A" form (*vide infra*) appears in the great Vernon Collection (see p. 107). Professor Skeat—whose repeated studies and editions of the poem culminated in the issue (2 vols. Clarendon Press) which is uniform with his Chaucer, and ranks as the standard—enumerates nearly fifty others.

[2] 1550, in three different forms, and 1561. Spenser, who refers to the poem in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, must have read one of these, unless his allusion at the end of December is, as some have thought, to the *Plowman's Tale*. This is to the last degree unlikely, as, if he knew this at all, he would have known it as Chaucer's, with whose works it was then printed, and Chaucer has been already disjunctively referred to in the preceding line.

[3] Among others by Wright 1842, revised 1856, and again reprinted 1887. This edition (to which Professor Skeat does that justice by which he is so admirably distinguished in comparison with too many so-called scholars when they deal with predecessors) would be the best of all for general reading, if it were not printed in half lines. It also contains *Piers Plowman's Creed*, an ill-tempered but vigorous Wyclifite lampoon in some 850 lines, which the critics will not allow to be Langland's, though they put it as early as 1394.

from the year mentioned above, it is earlier by some years than anything that we can date with probability as among the still existing works of Chaucer.

At first sight nothing can well be more different, not merely from the *Canterbury Tales*, but from all Chaucer's work, than the *Vision concerning Piers the Plowman*. It is in alliterative verse, according to the revived form of that rhythm so often mentioned in the last Book. The lines are tolerably equal in length, and they not unfrequently fall—urged by the inevitable pressure of the growth of the language and the literature—into Alexandrines, fourteeners, and other constructively metrical shapes. But they do not *aim* at any such structure, they rigidly abstain from rhyme, and they derive their whole poetical form from the middle pause, the fairly corresponding accents, and the three alliterated words, two in the first half and one in the second.[1] The appearance of much greater antiquity than Chaucer's which this gives, and which used to mislead the unwary, is assisted by a somewhat greater allowance of archaic words. But it is entirely false that, as used also to be said, Langland is more "Saxon" in his vocabulary than Chaucer. It has even been calculated by patient industry that his percentage of Latin and Romance words is, if anything, a little larger than Chaucer's; it is quite certain that if both were printed in modernised spelling, it would be at once seen not to be smaller.

The poem, despite its merit and the pains that have been spent on it of late years by interpreters, is by no means a very easy one to understand; and there are few that are more in need of an argument or a running marginal commentary. This arises from the fact that it is not one vision, nor even two, but a series of visions dissolving one into the other, often without any more attempt at coherence—of completion even in the dream-integer, such as it is—than actual dreams exhibit. It would seem as if the author, whether owing to his mysticism and its accompanying vagueness, or to his satiric intent, and the wholesome sense of danger which accompanied that, deliberately avoided rounding off his chapters and driving home his meanings. But the general scheme of the poem, which is divided into *passus*[2] or cantos, is as follows in the central or B text.

A prologue of rather more than two hundred lines tells how the Dreamer, in "a summer season when soft was the sun," put on a

[1] Langland sometimes indulges in four, but I think never puts himself out of the way for them, or for the extravagant and overloaded alliteration of five or even six words which we find elsewhere.

[2] Of these A has twelve (perhaps originally only eight), B twenty, and C twenty-three; but even where the three, or two of them, coincide there are often great variations. Wright's B text—Prof. Skeat does not number his continuously—has 14,696 short or half lines.

shepherd's smock like "a hermit unholy of works," and wandering on Malvern Hills, slept by a brook side, and saw a strange vision—a high tower (Heaven) on one side, a deep dungeon (Hell) beneath, and a "fair field full of folk" between (Middle Earth). And he describes the folk and their occupations with much *verve*, digressing, in the bewildering kaleidoscopic fashion which characterises the whole poem, to a very shrewd and early version of the "Bell-the-Cat" story. Indeed, no simile is at once so apposite or so illuminative for *Piers Plowman* as that of the kaleidoscope, in respect of the way in which elaborate arrangements of word and thought suddenly and without warning fall into something as elaborate, but quite different. The first *passus* proper opens with a promise, not too exactly kept, to expound the meaning of the tower, dungeon, and field; and their obvious interpretations are given by a lovely lady in linen clothed, who is Holy Church. Her speech is allegorical and digressive in the *Rose* manner—indeed, different as is his spirit, Langland is as full of the *Rose* inspiration as Chaucer himself. The second *passus* introduces—in sharp contrast to this figure, and in answer to the Dreamer's request to be told of Falsehood as she has said so much of Truth—another lady far more gorgeously clothed. This is "Meed the maid"—reward in the good sense, bribery, etc. in the bad—daughter of False (Falsehood), and betrothed to Favel (Fauvel, the hero of an allegorical French romance of the preceding age, and here signifying Flattery). Here Holy Church vanishes, and the current of the story is deflected in the usual odd manner to the marriage of Meed, which it is decided ought to take place in London. The bridal party set out thither under the escort of Simony and Civil Law, but Soothness anticipates them, tells Conscience, who tells the King, and a warm reception being prepared for the party, they disperse, leaving Meed the maid, who stands her ground, weeping. She is at the beginning of the third *passus* courteously taken by the middle and brought before the King. The natural seductiveness of Meed, and the fact that she *may* be honestly gained, are here glanced at. She confesses her sins, uses great largesse to the court generally, and the King promises that she shall marry Conscience, who, however, refuses utterly, giving his offered bride the worst possible character, and belabouring her with Latin quotations, against which she very naturally and indignantly protests. At the beginning of the fourth *passus* this uncompromising knight declines even to kiss her, "but Reason rede me thereto." The King thereupon bids him fetch Reason, who comes, supports Conscience, and brings over the King, who at the end of the fytte says, "As long as our life lasteth live we together."

Argument of the B Poem.

At the beginning of the fifth *passus* the dream is broken and

once more joined. A notice of the Rule of Reason leads or falls, after the mediæval fashion, into a long and vigorous passage on the Seven Deadly Sins, containing one of the most famous and brightly coloured passages of the poem, the description of a London tavern and the bibbers there. Only at the end of this *passus*, which includes some curious anticipations of Puritan nomenclature, does the personage who gives name to the poem, Piers the Plowman, make his appearance ; and even then he has a double portion of the floating phantasmagoric character that marks the whole. At one moment he is a simple plowman who digs and delves, and does what Truth hight, who has half an acre to ear, and cannot leave his work. But he is also a guide to Godliness, and has a wife Dame Work-while-it-is-time, a daughter "Do-right-or-thy-dame-shall-beat-thee," and a son with a longer title still. After dialogues and doings in the sixth with Hunger and others, he emerges in the seventh *passus* as Christ Himself, opposing the venal priests of the day, and teaching a better way to salvation. This is a sort of epilogue to the *passus*, and to the first part of the poem, which resolves itself in the Dreamer's own words into a counsel to seek the help of "Do-well."

But where is "Do-well" to be found ? That is the question with which the eighth *passus*[1] opens, and the second part of the poem. Certain friars, though they are quite sure he dwells among them, give no help, and a fresh dream brings to the poet's side Thought, who informs him that not only Do-well but "Do-bet"(ter) and Do-best must be sought. But he cannot tell where to find them, though Wit may. Wit in the ninth *passus* is prodigal of information about the three, about their relation to Lady Anima, and about the fact that Do-well is Obedience, Do-bet Love, and Active Benevolence Do-best. In the tenth *passus* Study, the wife of Wit, takes up the tale and confuses the Dreamer, "sternly staring" with more theology, sending him moreover to Clergy, who talks still more ("This is a long lesson," says the Dreamer, "and little am I wiser. Darkly ye show where Do-well is or Do-bet"), and to Scripture, who similarly occupies the eleventh. Kind and Reason follow, and at the end of this *passus* the Dreamer, thoroughly bemused, meets one of the most original characters of the whole shadowy procession, Ymaginatif—his own mother-wit apparently, or human reason, not antipathetic to but stopping short of theology. The thirteenth adds others, especially "Hawkyn[2] the Active Man," who cannot keep his clothes unspotten for his daily work—an allegory more open than some. Hawkyn discourses with Patience throughout this *passus* and the next, the

[1] The numbers, it must be remembered, are those of the B text : in A this *passus* is the *ninth*, and in C the *eleventh*.

[2] Hawkyn = Henrykin = Harry.

fourteenth, but the Dreamer, waking yet again at the beginning of the fifteenth, renews, and with reason, his wailing how it was wonder long ere he could kindly know Do-well. Nor in the long fifteenth *passus*, though according to the title "Do-well" is finished and "Do-bet" begun, can the process be said to be at all clear or satisfactory. We find, however, that the scholastic allegory of the last five *passus* is passing into simple Scripture-history and Christian teaching, and in the sixteenth Piers Plowman reappears, while both this *passus* and the seventeenth shape themselves more and more into a plain life of Christ Himself, leading in the eighteenth to the finest poetry of the whole—a splendid paraphrase of the Entry into Jerusalem, the Passion, and the Harrowing of Hell. This completes Do-bet = Love = Christ, and "Incipit *Do-best*," which also occupies the last or twentieth. But this is the vaguest and most unfinished part of the whole, Piers Plowman after Christ's death seeming to become the Church, and the two cantos leading to no conclusion whatever.

The so-called A text is much shorter than this. Not only are there but twelve *passus*, the work stopping at the end of the so-called *Vita de Do-well*, but the individual treatment of the different points is much less developed. Not a few of the more striking episodes of the B text, such as the Bell-the-Cat fable, do not appear. On the other hand, there are some things in A which were afterwards left out or completely refashioned, including almost the whole of the last *passus*. C is longer even than B, though the extension to twenty-three *passus* is rather misleading, the old Prologue now ranking as *Passus I.*, and some of the earlier divisions of B being split up and redistributed. And there are again some omissions. These, however, are compensated by long insertions, sometimes of the perhaps treacherously biographical kind, especially one in *Passus VI.* on which the biography-builders do much rely for Langland's London life; sometimes on "Lolling" and Friardom; sometimes of the more abstract philosophical kind. Indeed this later tendency has distinctly got the upper hand in C, as where, for instance, the quaint and vivid personality of "Hawkyn the Active Man" is changed into a Lorrisian abstraction called "Activa Vita."

On the whole, the presence of this abstraction in *Piers Plowman* has been too little allowed for by some of its eulogists, who have been seduced by the pictorial and dramatic force of the opening of the "Meed" scenes and others to put it rather in competition with the *Pilgrim's Progress*[1] than with the *Roman de la Rose*. There is

[1] Guillaume de Deguilleville, from whose *Pélerinage de l'Ame Humaine* Bunyan, through whatever channel, certainly did derive not a little, was as a dreamer before Langland also, just as he was before Chaucer, who adapted from him the *A B C*.

vivid portraiture in it, and there is a good deal of sharp and practical satire. But even in the Vision proper to some extent, and in *Do-well*, *Do-bet*, *and Do-best* to a very much greater, the reflective, theological, and allegorical side gets altogether the better of the dramatic and pictorial. To use the image suggested by the change between B and C just noted, Hawkyn the Active Man, who is not always present even in the early part, is hardly present at all in the second; and in his place we have pale abstractions arguing and jargoning about matters of the first importance in themselves—but ill suited for such treatment.

We cannot therefore put Langland by the side of Chaucer either for range, or for directness, or for artistic sense. To say, according to the common antithesis of the books, that he is a poet of the people, Chaucer one of the Court, is very idle. The author of the *Reeve's* and *Miller's Tales* is hardly to be charged with ignorance in respect of the people; and the author of the *passus* about Meed the Maid would certainly not have thanked his eulogists for presuming him to be unfamiliar with the Court. But it is true that Chaucer, to some extent, represents the Humanist and cosmopolitan distaste for politics and for controversial theology, while Langland represents a strong turn for both.[1] It is true also, though he himself seems to have been no Wyclifite or Lollard, that much of the tendency afterwards known as Puritan appears in him, and that, to our sorrow, the iconoclastic spirit, which was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to be the disgrace and curse of England, shows itself in angry remarks about church building and the putting up of painted windows. Intense, but narrow; pious, but a little Philistine—so we must pronounce him.

Nevertheless he had a great literary talent, which perhaps amounted to genius. The literary craftsmanship which succeeds in impressing on a form so uncouth as the unrhymed and only faintly metred alliterative verse the combination of freedom and order, of swing and variety, which marks *Piers Plowman*, is of that kind which must have distinguished itself whatsoever the form it happened to adopt. And although the architectonic gift, which might have enabled the poet to present a real whole instead of a series of dissolving views, is not present, yet it is astonishing with how little repugnance the reader who has once "got his hand in" accepts this apparent

[1] The politics of *Piers Plowman* itself are pretty distinct; those of *Richard the Redeless*, the attribution of which to Langland is one of the least doubtful of such things, are open to all. The poem (which is to be found in Professor Skeat's edition, and as "The Deposition of Richard II." in Wright's *Political Poems*, "Rolls Series," i. 368) is incomplete but extremely vigorous, though marred by the "Philistine" and ungenerous radicalism which is too frequently English.

incoherence, and resigns himself to see the visions rise and blend and melt, the bubbles swell and gleam and break. While as for the force of individual passages—the Prologue, the Fable, the best Court scenes, the London Tavern, the Harrowing of Hell—these have never been mistaken by any competent critic who has read them.[1]

Gower.

Beside the shadowy and in part apocalyptic figure of Langland, the solid, well-authenticated, somewhat prosaic personality and literary work of John Gower[2] present a contrast which has its interest. Gower, after being wrongly connected by tradition with more than one family and county, was definitely established by Sir Harris Nicolas as John Gower, Esquire, of Aldington, in Kent, and of other places. His birth-year is not certain; he died, old and it is said blind, in 1408, and his tomb is one of the numerous literary illustrations of the great and recently rebuilt church of St. Saviour's, or St. Mary Overy's, Southwark, with which Gower seems to have been connected in various ways. Indeed, though married, he appears to have been in minor orders.

His literary work even as we have it is considerable, but part of it is lost. Part also, both of what exists and of what does not, only indirectly concerns us here, being written in languages other than English. Gower is the last of the probably not small class of English men of letters between 1200 and 1400 who were trilingual —writing, and probably speaking, French, Latin, and English with equal facility. The principal existing piece of Gower's French is a set of fifty Ballades, the favourite French (*not* Provençal) form, with intertwisted identical rhymes, a recurrent refrain, and (generally) an *envoy*. But he also wrote in French one of the three divisions of his capital work, the *Speculum Meditantis*, a moral poem, in twelve divisions, on Vices and Virtues, which, after being long lost and misidentified, has been printed, in full length and dulness, at last. Another part of this, the *Vox Clamantis*, also exists, but is in Latin. It is a lively political poem in elegiacs with internal rhyme, dealing with the disturbances of Richard the Second's reign. Gower was a favourite of the unlucky but not unlettered king, and deserted him for the rising sun of Bolingbroke. This poem contains a very striking sketch of Wat Tyler's outbreak. Later, as a Lancastrian, the poet wrote

[1] The best commentary on the *matter* of Langland is, and is long likely to be, M. Jusserand's *L'Epopée mystique de W. Langland*. Paris, 1893.

[2] An excellent and standard edition of Gower (4 vols. Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), ranking with and in a way completing Prof. Skeat's Langland and Chaucer, has at last been produced by Prof. G. C. Macaulay. The *Confessio* is in Chalmers, and in separate editions by Dr. Pauli and (cheaply, but not quite completely) by Prof. Morley. The *Speculum* is in the Oxford ed. only; the minor French works were given by the Roxburghe Club and by Stengel (Marburg, 1886); the Latin by Wright (*Political Poems*, "Rolls Series"), and in the Roxburghe.

another poem of the same kind in leonine hexameters, which is called the *Tripartite Chronicle*, and is a strongly partisan account of Richard's errors and downfall. This is almost wholly historical: the *Vox* diverges into a good deal of miscellaneous matter (satire on the friars, etc.), which reminds us of *Piers Plowman*.

The *Confessio Amantis*, the third and English part of Gower's *opus magnum*, is much less vigorous and spirited than either of these Latin poems; but while they have no significance for English literature, it has much. It was undertaken at the hapless Richard's suggestion.[1] It is an immense poem, or collection of poems, in (with infinitesimal exceptions) octosyllabic couplets, accomplished to the point of extreme fluency, but curiously lacking in backbone and vigour. It fills, in Chalmers's *Poets*, some five hundred and fifty columns, each of which at its fullest holds nearly seventy lines; but Latin arguments of the various sections take some room. Probably there are between thirty and forty thousand lines in all. The author declares his purpose of writing in "the middle way," of composing a book half of pleasure and half of learning. After a long historical and miscellaneous prologue, he opens his first book with one of the stock complaints of the woes of lovers, and proposes to make his own confession to Genius—a *Rose* personage, of course. The confessor, after a sermon, appropriately or inappropriately illustrated as usual, begins to hear his confession, and succeeds in making of it a frame for a huge series of tales from classical and mediæval sources alike. Actæon, Perseus, and Ulysses are succeeded by the tale of Florent, the subject of Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale;* Narcissus jostles a king of Hungary; Alboin and Rosmunda have their place not far from Nebuchadnezzar. The beautiful story of Constance (*Emarè*, see *supra*), which Chaucer probably borrowed from Gower, appears; the original of *Pericles;* the tale of "Rosiphele," perhaps the original of *The Flower and the Leaf;* and dozens of others from all sources and of all sorts. The poem ends gracefully enough, though not altogether cheerfully, by Venus at once hearing the poet's prayer, and dismissing him from her court as too old for love, with a rosary of black beads hung round his neck inscribed *Pour Reposer*.

The *Confessio Amantis*.

Grace, indeed, Gower cannot be said with justice at any time to lack; his faults are the want of strength, of definiteness, in his conceptions and deliveries, the insignificant fluency of his verse, and above all, the merciless and heart-breaking long-windedness which results from it. Even this conclusion, which is full of true and touching things (as where Venus after her operations asks the forlorn

[1] Its exact date is matter of guesswork. It probably took a good many years to write, but *may* have been begun as early as 1383 or thereabout.

poet laughingly what love is, and he cannot answer her), is prolonged to such an extent that all the shock is expended, all the race and spirit watered down. In his own time, by himself and by Chaucer, Gower was specially called "moral." Venus, with her kindly scorn, acknowledges this gift in him, and dismisses him to its enjoyments now that he is unfit for hers. In recent days a slight imputation, not exactly of immorality, but of morality of a low kind, has in turn been cast on him. The truth seems to be that he was moral enough in the special contemporary fashion, which consisted in illustrating every point by some approved extract from authority, and by subjecting it as far as possible to the process of allegorical homilising. Although Chaucer casts, directly or dramatically, blame on his selection of such stories as those of Apollonius and Canace, this, if serious, would be rather a hypercriticism. But Gower has no passion, the "cold ointment" which Venus puts on his heart at the end of the *Confession* must, one would think, have been applied to some extent even before the beginning of it; and in his most pathetic serious stories (the humorous he hardly attempts) the sinewy directness of Chaucer, the mystical fire of Langland, are things to which he does not even try to attain.

Yet it would be a very great mistake to minimise or, like many, to pass by as negligible the contribution of Gower to English literature. Even in itself, if it has not the very highest qualities, it is far above contempt. Coleridge's rather pettish wish that Chalmers had given Lydgate instead, must have been caused either by very excusable ignorance of Lydgate's actual worth; or by a complete failure to recognise the formal superiority of Gower and the importance of his priority in time; or perhaps, and even probably, by that capriciousness which too often mars Coleridge's criticism. The contemporaries of Chaucer and Gower, and the immediate successors who entered into their labours, made no such mistake, though in the fifteenth century they sometimes, and not quite unjustly, promoted Lydgate himself to the actual company of his masters. That, historically and as a master, Gower had a real right to be ranked with Chaucer, is as unquestionable as that Gower is vastly Chaucer's inferior as a poet. We need not attach great value to the supposed and indeed probable priority of Gower to Chaucer himself. It is sufficient that they were certainly fellow-pioneers, fellow-schoolmasters, in the task of bringing England to literature. Up to their time, as we have established by actual survey, the literary production of the country, whether in the successive vernaculars of Anglo-Saxon and Early Middle English, or in the half-naturalised foreign tongues of French and Latin, had been exceedingly rudimentary and limited. All but a very small part of

Gower's reputation.

it had been purely religious or ecclesiastical; of the small "profane" portion the whole of the *belles lettres* division had been in verse; and again all but a very small part of this verse had been directly translated romance. It was the function of great writers now to establish the form of English as a thoroughly equipped medium of literature, and to furnish it further, as far as they could, with matter various in kind, and with varieties of style. Even Langland, a much more interesting and striking figure than Gower to us, could have been much better spared by his own generation than Gower himself. In literary form Langland had nothing to teach: he was in fact merely rowing off-stream, if not against it, up a backwater which led nowhither. In substance he was powerful rather than profitable, offering nothing but allegory, of which there was already only too much, and political-ecclesiastical discussion, a growth always nearer to the tares than to the wheat of literature. In other words, and to vary the metaphor, he gave the workmen in the new workshop of English letters no new or improved tools, he opened up to them no new sources of material. He was a genius, he was a seer, he was an artist; but he was neither master nor stock-provider in literature.

Gower was both. The want of zest and race in his literary style (though he has style), and still more in his poetical medium, must not be allowed to blind us to the fact that both show an enormous improvement on such immediate predecessors as Hampole, as the author of *The Pearl*, as the author of *Cursor Mundi*. He knows his craft far better than they did; he has better tools; he can teach others to turn out work that can be depended on, while they themselves, and all those who followed them, were constrained either to have touches of genius or to be frankly inadequate if not simply intolerable. Gower, unlike Chaucer, was apparently no master of prose, and his faculty in verse was strictly limited to the octosyllable in English—in Latin, as we have said, he could write more vigorously, if also more barbarously. But so far as he went he was distinctly an example of literary accomplishment—and examples of literary accomplishment were what England then wanted first of all.

What she wanted next Gower also saw, and this too he also, as he could, provided. It was a want which the plain common sense of Caxton saw still existing nearly a hundred years later, and which was never really supplied till a hundred more had passed; a want which explains the dearth and dulness so often charged against the fourteenth century; a want which no exceptional genius could supply. The English Muses simply did not *know* enough to do much: they wanted feeding, training, educating; they were in their nonage. Now the, to us, odd and cumbrous medley, the "marine store" of

the *Confessio Amantis*, was an attempt to supply these wants, to give matter and models at once: to write a book, as Gower says in the interesting exordium, which only his fatal fluency prevents from being quite excellent—

> After the world that whilome took
> Long time in oldë daiës past.

And

> to touch also
> The world that neweth every day.

That his efforts were not vain, the genuine gratitude of his immediate successors for his lessons in "rhethorike"—in form—testifies; and Chaucer and Shakespeare are perhaps sureties after whom it is unnecessary to produce any others as to the value of his contributions in matter.[1]

[1] Chaucer dedicates his *Troilus* to Gower and to the philosophical Strode—identified fairly well with Ralph Strode, who flourished about 1370, and seems to have written a good deal in Latin and English prose and verse. An attempt ingenious but purely fanciful, has been made to find the "*Pearl* poet" (pp. 79-81) in this Strode.

Note to Eighth Edition.—The student should be informed that, during the last few years, the usual (but unusually long delayed) attempts have been made to split up the authorship of *Piers Plowman* between four or five or more persons. These attempts (as usual also), were rather welcomed at first by some philologists, but were coldly received by other critics, and have not stood examination. It is certain that in so large a number of MS. copies (*v. sup.*) there may or must be interpolations. But no sound textual criticism has really invalidated, and almost all sound literary criticism supports, the theory that the author of "A," "B," and "C" was one.

CHAPTER III

CHAUCER'S PROSE—WYCLIF, TREVISA, MANDEVILLE

Turning-point in prose—Chaucer's prose tales—His *Boethius*—The *Astrolabe*—Wyclif—John of Trevisa—Sir John Mandeville—The first prose style

THE prose of the late fourteenth century in England is not to the mere literary taster, with one notable exception, at all comparable in interest to the verse of the same time. But it is hardly less important. For this time was in fact the beginning of English prose properly so called. Before 1350 it may be doubted whether there is a single English work in prose, with the exception of the *Ancren Riwle*, which unites the bulk and the literary quality of a book proper; and while the *Ancren Riwle* is still almost more Saxon than English in language, it belongs in subject to the division of sacred literature, which, though it is one of the noblest of all divisions, yet of necessity is less national, less idiosyncratic, than any other.

Turning-point in prose.

At the great turning-point, however, which, though it must have come sooner or later anyhow, was undoubtedly determined to no small extent by the concentration of English patriotic sentiment, owing to the conquests of Edward III., prose did not merely, like verse, make a fresh start, it made a start almost for the first time. From the later years of Edward and the reign of Richard II. date four writers of prose, each noteworthy in his own way, and three out of the four notable in something more than his own way—Chaucer the poet, Wyclif the controversialist, Trevisa the chronicler, and the shadowy personage long known, and perhaps even yet not entirely exorcised, as "Sir John Mandeville." All were translators in less or greater degree, but all also were originals of English prose writing.

The interest of Chaucer's prose works, the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, the translation of *Boethius*, the *Parson's Tale*, and the *Tale of Melibee*, is almost entirely an interest of form; and in the last that

interest is minimised and almost confined to the fitful and straggling emergence of blank verse, or something like it, at the opening. So too the *Parson's Tale*, a translation and a theological translation, does not advance us very much further than the prose treatises by or attributed to Hampole and his followers in the first half of the century. It is good straightforward English, but shows no attempt at style, while the well-worn and strictly prescribed common form of its matter expresses further limitations. The *Boethius* and the *Astrolabe* are superior. The version of the first, even if it were intrinsically less attractive, would inevitably invite comparison with Alfred's at the dawn of Saxon as this at the dawn of modern English prose, and the often noble, never contemptible, matter of the original could not and did not fail to stimulate an artist like Chaucer. But the most valuable point of the *Boethius* as an exercise for the pioneer in a new prose is the fact of the "Metres," which, especially when rendered by such a poet as Chaucer into a language with such illimitable latent possibilities as English, must needs result in far more ambitious and far more successful attempts in "the other harmony" than had yet appeared. Accordingly some of the metre passages in Chaucer's version, though quite legitimate and sound prose, attain a rhythmical as well as verbal dignity, which English prose was hardly to know again save in a few passages of Malory, Fisher, Berners, and the translators of the Bible, till late in the sixteenth century. And the whole shows that, if it had suited Chaucer to write more originally in prose, he might have effected a revolution therein at least as great as that which he did effect in verse, nay greater, seeing that he had practically no forerunners.

Chaucer's prose tales.

His *Boethius*.

The attractions of the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* are different, but perhaps they are not less. The specially pleasant and easy address to "little Lewis my son," for whom the treatise was compiled, and of whom, unluckily, we know no more, does not so much contrast with as supplement the interest of the piece as an early scientific treatise by one of the greatest of men of letters. The astrolabe was a small pocket instrument, somewhat of the sextant kind, for taking the altitudes and positions of the heavenly bodies; and though the object of its use was astrological rather than astronomical, it has, I believe, been admitted by "scientists" of the severest stamp that the treatise itself shows an exactness of scientific acquirement up to a certain point which certainly would not be easy to parallel in any but a specialist of modern times.[1] And it is not perhaps superfluous or impertinent to

The *Astrolabe*.

[1] Astronomy ("*Ast.* colit astra") was part of the regular mediæval *Quadrivium*.

add that astrology, a study which may be defined as rather extra-scientific than anti-scientific, and which at least attained a complete rigidity of scientific method, has an almost unsurpassed traditional interest for literature. To the time of Chaucer's great moderniser Dryden, it held the belief of the best informed and least generally credulous of men, and even since it went out of fashion, it has been splendidly celebrated in prose and verse by Scott and Coleridge. But in this treatise of Chaucer's, the great interest is the spectacle of an early example of the scientific application of literature and the literary handling of science.[1]

Wyclif.

The work of Wyclif,[2] a prose writer only, and a "sacred" and philosophical prose writer only, is less novel, less attractive, but not less important. Little, despite his fame and the violent partisanship for and against him, is really known of the author. We do not know when John Wyclif was born or where, though the probabilities connect his birth with the place of Wycliffe-on-Tees and the time of 1320-1325. He was certainly Master of Balliol (a northern college) at Oxford, in 1360; and by the confession of his opponents, was a recognised expert in theology and scholastic philosophy. He had, after giving up Balliol on his appointment to a college living, become Warden of Canterbury Hall, now merged in Christ Church; but was deprived of this post by the next Archbishop but one of Canterbury. Other preferments came to him, and in 1374 he received the Crown benefice of Lutterworth, which he held till his death, ten years later. The best-known event in his life was his

[1] A thing of more length than merit, the *Testament of Love*, used to be included in Chaucer's prose works, and may be found, by those who want it, in Chalmers and in Professor Skeat's Supplement. For once the exorcists are justified of their spells. Not only does the composition (an allegorical-religious treatise on the author's quest for a "Margaret," who is less doubtfully than usual a mere *eidolon* of Grace, or spiritual truth, or the Church) contain internal evidence that it is not Chaucer's in its reference to him, but, as any one who, knowing the *Boethius*, reads it will see at once, it pillages that book and others of his in a way which, barefaced in another, would be unintelligible in himself. It is now put down (a kind of signature being discovered) to a certain Thomas Usk, a busy Londoner, who was executed with a good deal of barbarity by the triumphant Gloucester faction in 1388. Usk did not quite deserve "hanging for his bad *prose*"; but it is not good.

[2] Wyclif's English work, outside the Bible, with some not his, is to be found in Mr. T. Arnold's *Select English Works of Wyclif* (3 vols.), Clarendon Press, and Mr. F. D. Matthew's *English Works of Wyclif hitherto unprinted* (E. E. T. S.). The whole *Bible*, a composite work of Wyclif and others, was edited in 4 vols. 4to by Forshall and Madden, Oxford, 1850; the *Gospels* (very conveniently printed in parallel columns, with the early Gothic and A.S. versions and Tyndale's) by Bosworth and Waring (3rd ed. London, 1888). His very voluminous Latin works, philosophical and ecclesiastical, have been tackled by a special Wyclif Society.

summons to appear in St. Paul's on a charge of heresy in 1377, on which occasion the court was practically broken up by the turbulence of Wyclif's partisan, John of Gaunt. Into the nature and extent of his heresies we are here precluded from entering. On "Dominion," on Transubstantiation, and other points, they reached the extreme of scholastic subtlety; and perhaps the most practical part of his tenets was the establishment of an irregular order of "poor priests," who took the field at once against the corrupt friars and the extravagantly endowed prelates of the time. These poor priests, more definitely than Wyclif himself, were responsible for the "Lollardy" which, though its first-fruits in the Wat Tyler insurrection came in Wyclif's lifetime, developed later, and did not call for sharp repression till the reigns of Henry IV. and Henry V. Much of Wyclif's tendency in politics ecclesiastical is observed in Langland, but the latter shows no sign of any doctrinal heresy.

The English literary work of Wyclif and the Wyclifites (for a large part of the University of Oxford was saturated with his doctrine, and the complete body of Wyclifian literature is rather an earlier "Tracts for the Times" than the work of any one man) consists on the one hand of a new and complete translation of the Bible, on the other of a considerable mass of tracts and sermons intended for popular consumption. In some respects these latter are not very delightful or profitable reading. We find already in them the hard, narrow intolerance of contrary opinion and the refusal to believe in its honesty, the savage, churlish hatred of all the beauty of holiness—music (the "knacking of new songs," as the Wyclifite catchword has it), painted windows, fair architecture, and all that makes the mediæval church gracious and precious in our eyes—the almost Iscariot-like grudging of all expense on divine worship that is not "given to the poor," the rage, at least as much political and social as theological, at wealthy and exalted bishops and abbots, the sectarian jealousy between "poor priests" and friars,—all the ugly Philistine sourness, in short, which disgraces the extreme Protestant party of the sixteenth century and the extreme Puritan party of the seventeenth. There is little room in this furious cudgel-play of partisan hatred for the serene exercise in elaborate prose which Chaucer gives us in the *Boethius*, for the scientific precision of the *Astrolabe*, for the gay and varied garrulity of Mandeville. A few lively touches of manners, a few of the less merely "teeth-gnashing" flouts of satire, a quaint phrase here and there, a racy translation of antiquity—these are the principal attractions which the Wyclifite tracts have to offer; while as for the Translation of the Bible, as it cannot compete as literature with that produced some two centuries later, so it has merely the same attraction as matter. It should be observed that there are

later and earlier versions of it, the former much the more advanced in grammar and style.

Nevertheless both, as much the one as the other, were most important as contributions to English prose. Wyclif and his coadjutors brought to both their tasks—that of translation and that of tract-writing—a combination of education and of "object" which has been very rare in literary history. They were all trained in the severest science of scholastic study, the most thorough perhaps that has ever been seen. Even a Bachelorship of Divinity represented four years' training in arts, three more in the quadrivium of mediæval science, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy; and seven more still in theology. Every man who had gone through this had been in the habit of constant disputes with opponents, on the watch to note the slightest vagueness of definition, the slightest illicit process of argument. Yet these accomplished scholars were in their new venture addressing the common people first of all. Their training compelled them to be precise; their object compelled them to be forcible. In the translation of the Bible they had a wide range of the most various kinds of literature, history, poetry, oratory, philosophy, parable,—matter which still retained, after being passed through the Latin sieve, large admixture of its original Oriental elements to colour and diversify the English result. In their tracts they had above all things to be exact in aim to meet their enemies, and to be forcible to attract disciples. No better exercising ground for an infant prose, in at least some ways, could have been provided, than this combined one of translation and polemic. We do not, indeed, find in Wyclif, or in any of the immediate Wyclifites, the full consequences, which we shall find fifty years later in Pecock's *Repressor*, of a vocabulary and arrangement varying between extreme scholasticism and extreme vernacularity, but we find approaches in both directions.

The third prose author of this time owes his position to reasons rather different from those which have preferred Chaucer, Wyclif, and Mandeville. He is neither a great poet who was an almost equally great all-round man of letters, nor an eager controversialist who has linked his name with one of the great versions of the Bible (there seems to have been an idea in Caxton's mind that Trevisa did translate the Bible, but nothing else is known of it), nor an interesting if shadowy personality whose name is attached to a charming piece of literature. He simply produced an English version of the Latin Chronicle or *Polychronicon* of Ralph Higden, which had been written not so very much before his own day. Higden was a West-countryman, who was born about the last decade but one of the thirteenth century;

John of Trevisa.

became a monk of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Werburgh at Chester; perhaps (it is necessary to lay stress on that "perhaps") had something to do with English literature directly in the matter of the Chester Plays, and certainly wrote this *Polychronicon*, one of the usual historical surveys, "beginning at the beginning," narrowing to a rather more particular survey of Jewish and Roman history with others, and ending with that of England continued to the writer's own time. Higden is said, on the not altogether trustworthy authority of Bale, to have died in 1363. Not very long after this his book was Englished[1] by John of Trevisa, who, as the "Tre" shows, was a Cornishman, but seems to have been chiefly connected with Berkeley in Gloucestershire. He is said to have died in 1413, but his History was finished as long before as 1387. The piece has more interest for its matter, which includes much early (indeed the earliest) description of England in English, and for the evidence it gives of the now unrestrainable impulse to write about English matters generally in the English tongue, than for any special literary merit or savour. Trevisa, who seems to have been no great scholar in Latin, for he confesses that he could not always understand his original, was no genius in English. But his style is racy from its age, and agreeable for its want of pretension. In his day a man deserved almost more credit for undertaking a long work in English than most men would deserve now for abstaining from it.

The last name to be mentioned in this chapter is by far the most interesting in the special connection of English prose. But the discussion of it is complicated, and obstructed by a more than ordinary amount of those teasing and extra-literary squabbles about authorship and authors which meet us so frequently. Nay, in consequence of the doubts which have been raised as to the existence of Sir John Mandeville, and the proofs (not invalid as such things go) that the real author was a French or Flemish physician of Liège, proposals have even been made to oust the book[2] altogether from English literary history and give it to French.

These proposals cannot for one moment be admitted. The French version of Mandeville may be—very likely is—the oldest. It

[1] Edited, with the Latin, in the "Rolls Series." As with nearly all the early historians, the interest of the work for literature can be almost sufficiently gauged by sample, and a dozen pages of extract will be found in Morris and Skeat, Part II.

[2] There is no thoroughly satisfactory edition. Wright's, in the Bohn Library (among *Early Travels in Palestine*), is too much modernised; Mr. Warner's, for the Roxburghe Club, is not generally accessible. Halliwell's, more than once reprinted, is the best *edition;* and Mr. E. B. Nicholson, Bodley's Librarian, is the best authority on the disputed points, which he has treated in the *Encylopædia Britannica* and elsewhere.

may have been—it very likely though by no means necessarily was—written by some one who was not an Englishman. But it is a book which, in the history of literature, has very little importance. French prose had been written currently on all subjects for two centuries before it; and there was nothing remarkable in its existence. No one has contended that the French author can for a moment vie with Villehardouin, or Joinville, or his own contemporary Froissart, as a prose-writer. The book has had no influence on French literary history—no great French writer has been inspired by it, none of its "notes" in the least corresponds to any mark of French. The contrary of all these things is the case in regard to the English version. Even the infidels do not place that version much later than 1400, and it may be permitted to doubt whether it is not older; for though the prose shows an advance in ease and resource on Wyclif, a great one on Trevisa, it is not much, if at all, in front of Chaucer. It is quite an admirable thing in itself; it shows, if it be a translation, that some third person must be added to Malory and Berners to make a trinity of such English translators, as the world has rarely seen, in the fifteenth century. It expresses with remarkable fidelity the travelling mania of the English, and in the stories of the "Watching of the Falcon," the "Daughter of Hippocrates," and others, it has supplied romantic inspiration for generation after generation. As French it is little or nothing to Frenchmen or to France; as English it is a great thing to England and to Englishmen.

Sir John Mandeville.

The facts as to authorship and contents are as follows. The book purports to have been written by Sir John Mandeville of St. Albans, who began to travel on Michaelmas Day 1322, journeyed in the East for thirty years and more, and after obtaining leave from the Pope, and coming home a sufferer from gout, produced his book in Latin and French and English in 1356. Later accounts have it that he was buried at Liège. Against this are the facts that no other notice of any such Sir John Mandeville exists; that the arms quoted as on the Liège monument have nothing to do with any family of the name; and that, as we have mentioned, the French version seems to be much anterior to the English, if not also to the Latin. Further, before any more serious doubts had been started about Mandeville's personality than those which arose from the marvels narrated in his book, and which had almost from the first caused it to be regarded as a capital example of a "traveller's tale,"—it had been observed that its contents were very far from original. A certain Friar Odoric may have travelled in "Cathay" (Chinese Tartary), and had his travels written down by a brother of his Order, as early as 1330. Now the resemblance between Mandeville and Odoric is striking. Further

borrowings, certain or extremely probable, have been indicated from another Franciscan friar, from an Armenian named Hayton, from a German knight named Boldensele, and from others. Part, it is true, is not accounted for, and seems to be direct personal experience; but the whole is very like a blend of such experience with matter from earlier books. And the compiler has been identified with a certain Liège physician, John of Burgundy or John of the Beard, who is said to have revealed his personality on his deathbed to a third John, John of Outremeuse. Perhaps we may not impertinently, like Prince Henry, take leave of all these withered old Johns and Sir Johns, whose identity is shadowy in the extreme and of no importance.

Once more the book is the thing; and the importance of the book, by whomsoever written, at whatsoever time anterior to the latest (the beginning of the fifteenth century) at which it can possibly have appeared, and whether translation or original, remains for the history of English prose immutable and inexpugnable. The title of "Father of English Prose," which used to be given to Mandeville, is indeed rather silly, as are all such titles, if only in that they provoke the chronological and other squabbles from which literary study has suffered so much. No one man could be "the Father of English Prose" at any time; and as a matter of fact it had, as we have seen, at this time at least four simultaneous fathers. What the *Voyage and Travaile* really is, is this—it is, so far as we know, and even beyond our knowledge in all probability and likelihood, the first considerable example of prose in English dealing neither with the beaten track of theology and philosophy, nor with the, even in the Middle Ages, restricted field of history and home topography, but expatiating freely on unguarded plains and on untrodden hills, sometimes dropping into actual prose romance, and always treating its subject as the poets had treated theirs in *Brut* and *Mort d'Arthur*, in Troy-book and Alexandreid, as a mere canvas on which to embroider flowers of fancy. It is the first book of *belles lettres* in English prose, and this is such a priority as the most ambitious of authors, identified or unknown, might be content with. And being such, it deserves a brief handling of its material and formal characteristics, such as we have given to its verse predecessors in the same supreme, and indeed only purely literary, department of literature.

The extreme attractiveness of the matter, and the delightful illustrations of old attached to it, have perhaps a little drawn away attention from the fact that the form of the book is well worthy of the substance. A summary of the life of our Lord (for it must be remembered that the book is primarily a road-book for the Holy Land) leads to a description of Constantinople and a précis of the tenets of the Greek Church. Then we cross the "Brace of St.

George" (Sea of Marmora) and come to Asia Minor, where Cos gives us the "Daughter of Hippocrates," and Rhodes another wild tale, and Cyprus an account of hunting leopards. Jerusalem itself follows, and "Babylon" (which it must be remembered is always Cairo in the Middle Ages), and a long account of Egypt and of Arabia, and how roses came into the world, and of Jerusalem again, and of whole Palestina. Only after this do we get into the true Utopian El Dorado of Mandeville, with the "Watching of the Spar-hawk" in an Armenian castle (what time the Ark still was visible on the top of Ararat), and the Customs of Ind, and the great Cham of Cathay, and the royal State of Prester John, and the four floods that come from the Paradys Terrestre. There is hardly a page in the book which is not full of interesting detail, of romantic suggestion, of fact sublimed and opalised by imagination, or by the mere process of continuous report from lip to lip and book to book.

But the great interest for us is that here, and here for the first time distinctly, the subject and the idiosyncrasy of the author produce between them a *style*. There are approaches to a style in Chaucer; but he was kept too close to his text in *Boethius*, to his subject in the *Astrolabe*. Wyclif might have reached one; Trevisa probably could not; Mandeville did. His object being to produce his effect by the accumulation of interesting marvels, with few models before him except the arrangements of the Bible, he mostly affects short sentences, and has a trick of beginning each with "And." This conjunction is dear to the story-teller, because it has a sort of arresting and exciting effect upon the hearer, by promise of something fresh; while the long periodic sentence, besides requiring greater practice, is apt to weary hearers as opposed to readers. The vocabulary is simple and rather modern, with few obsolete or archaic words, as indeed might be expected, whether the book was really the work of a cosmopolitan traveller or that of a mere homekeeping forger of letters. Few books of the time, when the spelling is completely modernised, have so little uncouthness about them. And one thing (rarely to be said of any author, rarest of one mediæval in time) is that this author knows exactly when he has said enough. Nothing tempts him to the fatal loquacity of nearly all writers between the Dark Ages and the Renaissance, and he will even apologise for the Sparrowhawk discussion which tells the reason of the woes of Armenia. "This is not the right way to go to the parts that I have named, but for to see the marvel." To see the marvel of the rising of literary prose style in English there is no better way than to read Mandeville.

The first prose style.

INTERCHAPTER III

SHORT as is the period which has been covered in the preceding Book, and few as are the names which it contains, we have at last reached in it one, the importance of which has, in great part at least, not to be pleaded for. At no time during the present century—at no time, indeed, during the last five centuries, except, and that not universally, for a short interval during the eighteenth—would the right of Chaucer to a place, and a great one, in English literary history have been contested; while, silly as the title of "Father of English Prose" may be, the fact of its having been long ago awarded sometimes to Mandeville, sometimes to Wyclif, is a piece of evidence in itself. Yet there is no need for this to break the good custom of these interposed summaries; indeed, one at the present juncture may have special value.

For it is impossible to appreciate too clearly the exact position of Chaucer in poetry, while that of himself and his contemporaries in prose certainly has not always been appreciated with even the least clearness—if Professor Earle had any justification for saying, not more than a few years ago, that "there exists a general impression among educated Englishmen that our prose dates from the sixteenth century."[1]

Even to appreciate Chaucer with exactness and propriety is by no means a matter of course; yet without such an appreciation it is impossible to get the parts of the history into true proportion and connection. At no time have competent readers failed to perceive his abounding humour, the shaping faculty which enables him to make every character at once an individual and a type, the "gold dewdrops of his speech," the sweetness of his music. Perhaps we have outgrown (there is at any rate no excuse for us if we have not) the idea entertained even by Dryden that this sweetness is "rude," that there is something untutored and infantine about it. But it may be doubted whether even yet, whether even among persons who may

[1] *English Prose*, p. 369.

boast some acquaintance with him, an accurate estimate of his position in regard both to the past and the immediate future prevails. It so happens, oddly enough, that the first part of this has been expressed with extreme propriety of fact, and in words that could not be bettered in another language in reference to another person, by a writer who probably had never heard of Chaucer, and would have regarded him as a savage if he had. Boileau's famous couplet—

> Villon sut le premier dans ces siècles grossiers
> Débrouiller l'art confus de nos vieux romanciers—

is, as it stands, a sort of Helot among critical utterances. The *siècles* were not *grossiers;* Villon was not the first to "disembroil" poetical art of any kind; and what he did had nothing whatever to do with the *vieux romanciers*, but was the infusion of a modern spirit into forms already arranged for him as exactly and neatly as any art could be arranged. But the second line expresses precisely what Chaucer did in English, and what gives him, if not his chief title to admiration as a poet, his chief place in literary history. He, in fact and in deed—

> Débrouilla l'art confus de nos vieux romanciers.

It already existed in plentiful quantity, and now and then in no inconsiderable degrees of accomplishment. But it was all in the shape of *brouillon*—of rough draft. Men had practised the octosyllabic couplet for centuries, but they had never succeeded in writing it with a sure mastery at once of vigour and of variety, of smoothness and of strength. They had got safely through very intricate stanzas, but no one of them had any stanza so under his command as to write anything at all approaching the best passages—indeed practically the whole—of *Troilus*. They had now and then stumbled upon the great heroic couplet itself, but they had hardly known it when they saw it, and had invariably let it slip again, even if they perceived its character. Nay, in his own day, some men were even relapsing from the point that art had reached on the earlier stage of "rim ram ruf"—on the rhythmical prose of alliteration, either simple of itself or awkwardly bedizened, like a true savage art, with feathers and gawds of inappropriate stanza and rhyme.

All this Chaucer *débrouilla*—set straight, copied out fair, and left the copy so transposed as a testimony for ever, and a point to which men might return, but which, once gained, they never could really lose. He was no doubt powerfully backed on the more artistic side by Gower, but Gower had, in English at least, little strength; and he was far more powerfully backed on the other by Langland, but Langland had, or chose to have in this respect, an inferior and

antiquated art. In the union of the two Chaucer stood alone, and fortunately he was quite able to stand alone.

To such an estimate the demur may be made, "If he did so much, how was it that outside his own work so little resulted—that nearly a century and a half had to pass after his death before any real advance was made?" To this, of course, no absolutely complete answer can be given. The most philosophical view of the philosophy of history never pretends to explain all the facts, especially in regard to "the times and the seasons." The best explanation why there is no poet in English—even in Scots—who is the equal of Chaucer, between Chaucer himself and Surrey, is that, as a matter of fact, no such poet appeared. But we can give some side-explanations, some, as it were, marginal notes on this, and we can at any rate see that things were much better as they were. If Chaucer had not appeared when he did, the language might have got into ways too slovenly for it to acquire a real *Ars poetica* at all, might have succumbed to the rigid syllabic prosody of French (there was some danger of this for a long time to come), or have gone off "rim-ram-ruffing" into the wilderness. But since he appeared when he did, his work was necessarily exposed to the drawback that it was composed in a language which had still not acquired its complete modern form. The final *e*, a troublesome and by this time a useless thing, which meant anything and everything and nothing, had to be shed; some other structural changes had to be gone through. Above all, the language had to pass under certain modifications of sound which have never yet been fully explained. In this welter Chaucer could not be equalled; Spenser could not come till it was over. But through it all Chaucer's work remained, above the welter itself, a pattern and a beacon at once.

The influence of Gower, infinitely less as is his value for us, was probably not so very much less than Chaucer's for his own contemporaries. The third great poetical figure of the time exactly reverses these conditions. Langland is for us a true, nay a great, poet; his reactionary aberrations in form can do us no harm, and his apocalyptic obscurity adds something of a zest to our reading of him. These would not have been the best of influences on his own age, which was urgently in need of formal correction, and was not at all in need of incitements to allegorical meandering. But, as a matter of fact, he does not seem to have exercised much, if he exercised any, influence, and what he had was in the direction of political and other satire, not that of poetry proper. Even the alliterators did not usually follow his straightforward reliance on alliteration and accent, but confessed their sense of insufficiency by calling in more and more the aid of stanza and of rhyme.

The formal importance of the age in prose is hardly less, though its productions have far less intrinsic interest. The excursion of prose beyond the narrow limits of theological matter which had so long confined it was one great thing; the use of it to address the common people, who had hitherto been only accessible by verse, was another. That the third limit—translation—which had been imposed upon it still remained, was no drawback for the time. Very much more importation of vocabulary; very much more experiment, like that of Pecock in the next age, with term-forging; very much more copying of the more accomplished prose forms of French and Latin, were necessary before the resources of style could really be at the command of the English prose-writer in miscellaneous subjects. But the return to vernacular writing in history, more than two hundred years after the pen had left the hand of the last annalist of Peterborough, meant a very great deal; the application of the genius for letters of such a man as Chaucer to scientific exposition in the *Astrolabe*, to philosophical exposition in the *Boethius*, meant a great deal more; perhaps the example of prose narrative of the easy, interesting, not first of all instructive kind in Mandeville meant most of all. This fascinating shadow, whatever else he was, and whatever else he did, was the spiritual father of Malory and Berners, of Lyly and Sidney, of Defoe and Fielding, of Miss Austen and Scott. They were still long to be "bodiless childfuls," but they were now "bodiless childfuls of life," and Sir John, if ever any other, gave them that life.

Lastly, we must not forget, though considerations of weight have necessitated a mere allusion to it as yet, that the third great kind, the kind which is not essentially prose nor essentially verse, but partakes of both—to wit, Drama—was by this time certainly born in English. It was as yet in swaddling clothes; perhaps we must not be too absolutely certain that any single piece now actually in our possession existed in the form in which we have it now.[1] But there is no reason for doubt that this momentous and important kind—which was to absorb the greatest genius of the first really complete age of English literature, which was to confer inestimable benefits upon both prose and verse, and was to be the first literary kind to engage, apart from some consideration of profit, the attention of a great audience—had for some time left the use of Latin and become common in the vernacular. It was still, as has been said, in swaddling clothes, it was performed and composed in ways unfavourable to a rapid, accomplished literary development, it was limited in subject, awkward in form; but it was the drama—the direct ancestor

[1] The well-known *Harrowing of Hell* is possibly as early as *Alison*, but it is faintly dramatic, and there is a long interval between it and other things.

of the great Elizabethan drama itself—and its presence in the list of literary kinds is a matter of the first importance.

In short, the literary work of the Middle Ages proper in England was now complete, and, with a good fortune rare and almost unparalleled, what they had given was caught up, summed, uttered in perfect form by a poet of the greatest genius, and a prose writer of no small talent. Perhaps this good fortune had in a manner to be paid for by the relapse in poetry which the next century saw. But even this was a rest as well as a relapse, and meanwhile prose the unresting, if also the unhasting, was making advances as steady as they are unmistakable.

BOOK IV

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

THE ENGLISH CHAUCERIANS—LYDGATE TO SKELTON

Contempt for fifteenth-century literature — Lydgate — Occleve — Bokenam — Audelay and Minors—Hawes—The *Pastime of Pleasure*—The *Example of Virtue*—Barclay—The *Ship of Fools*—The Eclogues—Skelton—His life—His poems.

FEW sections of English Letters have been more abused or more disdained than the literature, and especially the purely English poetry, of the fifteenth century. The contemptuous ignorance of M. Taine extended even to the Scottish poets, who have been more generally excepted from condemnation; and less excusable under-valuation of these same has been made by critics, at least to the language born, such as Mr. Lowell and Mr. Lounsbury. Even those who do not commit the unpardonable or inexplicable error of belittling or ignoring Dunbar and Henryson have usually a short shrift and a long drop for the English writers of the time, and especially for the English poets.

Contempt for fifteenth-century literature.

Of these disdains literary history knows nothing; and nothing is to be passed over by her unless it is at once devoid of intrinsic attraction, and of no importance as supplying connections and origins. Even from the first point of view, slighting of the *Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo*, of the *Testament of Cressid*, of the *King's Quair*, of Malory and Berners, of the *Nut-browne Maid*, and the carol "I sing of a maiden," must convict the slighter either of invincible bad taste, or of ignorance that cannot be too soon corrected. From the second, the period which shows us the progress in, and the final stoppage of, the blind alley of alliteration, the strange

failure to make the improvement that might have been expected on the magnificent advantages given by Chaucer, the process, slow but sure, of elaborating the machinery and amassing the capital of English prose, the probable beginning of the ballad, the spread and popularising of the drama,[1] and the certain and glorious ending of romance, need not be ashamed of itself in any company which knows and observes the laws of literary history.

The poets, both Scotch and English, of this century were wont to leash with Chaucer and Gower in the triplet of masters whom they acknowledged and hailed with reverence John Lydgate, the "Monk of Bury." Very little is known of the life of this voluminous, somewhat undistinguished, but by no means unpleasant or uninteresting poet, who has had decidedly hard measure in the way of presentation to modern readers, though the Early English Text Society has begun to devote a portion of its too small resources and its too largely drawn upon labour to the task.[2] The latest certain date in his life is 1446. As the dates of his orders are—sub-deacon, 1389; deacon, 1393; and priest, 1397, he may have been born about 1370. He appears to have enjoyed the advantages of the three greatest European Universities of his day—Oxford, Paris, and Padua—and his knowledge both of ancient and modern literature must have been pretty complete for the time. He taught rhetoric at Bury St. Edmunds, and it must be remembered that Rhetoric, which had for many centuries, legitimately or illegitimately, extended itself in the sense of the Art of Prose Literature, had by this time absorbed poetics likewise, and that in the fifteenth century especially "rhetorike" and (in French) *rhétoriqueur* are words almost interchangeable with "poetry" and "poet." Unluckily, as from the days of Martianus Capella[3] downwards rhetoric and ornate diction had been closely connected, this also became confounded with poetry, and the main objection to fifteenth-century verse next to, or indeed connected

[1] For reasons given *post* it has seemed better to reserve the dramatic matter, which might have made some appearance even earlier, and has a fair claim to a place here, for the next Book, so far as the main text is concerned. See also Interchapters iii. (*supra*) and iv. (*infra*).

[2] Until this reissue, which has already given the *Temple of Glass* and other things, was begun, Halliwell's edition of the *Minor Poems* for the Percy Society, and the *Story of Thebes*, and some smaller pieces given by Chalmers in his Chauceriana, formed the accessible Lydgate, illustrated by four-and-twenty pages of bibliography, which Ritson devotes in his *Bibliographia Poetica* (London, 1802) to "this voluminous, prosaick, and drivelling monk," as the critic, with his usual sweetness, describes his subject.

[3] This crabbed, but to fit tastes not unpleasing, writer paints the breast of Rhetoric as *exquisitissimis gemmarum coloribus balteatum*, gives her arms which clash *velut fulgoreae nubis fragore colliso bombis dissultantibus*, and assigns to her a *vox aurata*—all transparent allegory.

with, its prolixity and dulness, is its addiction to "aureate" terms—that is to say, bombastic classical or pseudo-classical phraseology.

In this Lydgate is not quite such a sinner as some of his contemporaries and still more his successors. He could now and then catch something at least of the propriety of language which is one of his master Chaucer's glories, and he was also less to seek than any other of that master's purely English followers in versification, though he too shows some signs of that curious confusion of poetic tongue which came upon his time.

The early printers, Caxton, Pynson, and Wynkyn de Worde, in whose time Lydgate still ranked as one of the *di majores* of English literature, were not unkind to him; but the mania for early printed books as such has made these editions entirely inaccessible, save in public libraries, to the lover of literature who is not a millionaire. At last the E.E.T.S. reprints have reproduced a fair body of his work, much of the current abuse of which is only an echo of the violence of Ritson, a critic seldom to be undervalued when he praises, but too often merely to be neglected when he blames. The *Thebes* poem, which was obviously intended as a pendant to the *Knight's Tale*, gives the more canonical history of the wars which are taken for granted as precedent in Chaucer's poem, consists of between four and five thousand verses in couplets (*vide infra*), and begins as a *Canterbury Tale* with a prologue, references to Ospringe and other localities, and an invitation by the host to "Dan John" to tell it. In this piece the characters of Statius and those of Boccaccio are both drawn upon, and the story is sufficiently well told, though with too many speeches and involutions, and with little share of Chaucer's orderly and artful action. The most noteworthy thing about it, however, as about most of the poetry of Lydgate, of Occleve, and even of Hawes, not to mention smaller men, is that strange loss of "grip" in versification which has been more than once referred to. How far this is due to careless or ignorant copying or printing cannot be said with confidence until a much larger amount of Lydgate's enormous work has been competently edited from the MSS.; but attempts to make him out an elaborate and harmonious metrist are little less than preposterous.[1] The truth would rather seem to be that Chaucer was too

Lydgate.

[1] If Lydgate is really responsible for the following lines in an account of Henry VI.'s entry into London (*Minor Poems*, p. 3), no bathos and no bad verse can have been inaccessible to him—

Their clothing was of colour full convenable:
The noble Mayor clad in red velewet (!)
The Sheriffs, the Aldermen, full notable,
In furrèd clokys the colour scarlett.

Observe that "In furrèd clokys, scarlet in colour," is an obvious change, and makes a very fair line.

far in advance of his time both in ear and in perception of the capabilities of the language; that his followers completely failed to adjust pronunciation and versification, and to understand versification itself, while their failure was made worse by rapid and uncertain changes in the language, as the dialects blended, as the final *e* fell off, and as the very vowel-sounds altered. Certain it is that in Lydgate, still more in Occleve, and more or less in all the others of this chapter, while the line sometimes loses all rhythmical sufficiency, though it does yield ten syllables to the finger, it at many other times fails to respond even to this mechanical test, and simply sprawls—a frank and confessed nondescript or failure.

These faults appear, but somewhat less, in the *Complaint of the Black Knight* and the other smaller poems caught in the great "Chauceriana" net. The rhyme royal of the *Complaint* seems to have acted as a sort of support and stay to the backboneless writers of this time. In the other shorter poems, and in the pleasant piece of *London Lickpenny*—perhaps Lydgate's best-known thing, but grudged him, sometimes on the unkind ground that it is too good, sometimes for philological reasons, to which it may be objected that the accepted text acknowledges itself to be posthumous and rewritten—there is naturally much more variety and liveliness. Not that there is a lack of convention even here. It is exceedingly rash to take the confessions of youthful follies and peccadilloes which Lydgate makes in his *Testament*, just as Occleve does in his *Male Règle*, and many other poets of this and other ages elsewhere, for solid biographical documents. The chief of Lydgate's other works are the *Temple of Glass*, the very title of which is redolent of fifteenth-century allegory; the *Falls of Princes*, perhaps his most popular book in his own day, adapted from Boccaccio, and itself serving as model to the famous miscellany of the *Mirror for Magistrates* in the sixteenth century; a *Troy Book*, one of the numerous versions of Guido Colonna's plagiarism from Benoît de Sainte-More; an extraordinarily quaint Englishing of Deguileville's *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, interesting both for itself and for its foreshadowing of Bunyan; a most dismal *Assembly of Gods*, even more religious than moral, and making both its themes disgusting; part of a translation of the *Secreta Secretorum; Proverbs;* the *Court of Sapience;* a *Life of Our Lady;* a *Chronicle of English Kings;* Lives of his patron at Bury St. Edmunds; and so forth. These are but a few of the enormous number of works attributed to him. But the general value of Lydgate is not hard to fix. He is a scholar not a master, a versifier rather than a poet; an interesting figure in a time of groping and transition, and perhaps not so very unlike other figures in other times.

Thomas Occleve[1] (there seems to be as good authority for this as for the somewhat uglier form "Hoccleve") is, and probably will continue to be, inseparably connected in literary history with Lydgate, of whom he is a much less voluminous and rather less accomplished double. He was often given to autobiographic details of the preciser kind, and from two of these we gather that he must have been born about 1368 (*where* is guesswork, the nearest locality in spelling being Hockcliffe in Bedfordshire). He entered the Privy Seal Office when he was about twenty, and we have abundant records of payments to him for parchment, ink, and wax used, as well as of salaries and pensions. He was always expecting a benefice or "corrody" (annuity charged on ecclesiastical revenues); but nothing came till 1424, when he was quartered, to an extent not exactly defined, on the Priory of Southwick in Hampshire. We may have something of his as late as 1448, and he may have died a little later, say 1450. Occleve.

Occleve's principal work is an English version or adaptation in rhyme-royal of one or more Latin originals, under the title of *De Regimine Principum*,[2] preceded by a long introduction, partly autobiographic and wholly moralising. The enthusiastic address to his "master dear" Chaucer, of whom, be it remembered, one of his MSS. preserves the most probably authentic portrait, is the most interesting thing in this lugubrious and desultory work, of which the versification frequently sprawls and staggers in a fashion beside which even Lydgate's is well girt and neatly moving.

Among the smaller pieces attention has chiefly been given to the above-referred-to piece, entitled *La Male Règle de T. Occleve*, which seems to have been written when the poet was coming to forty years, *after* which age of wisdom, however, he married—for love, he says. This poem has the invariable characteristics of such regrets for lost youth, together with the less usual peculiarity that the poet represents himself as not merely a ne'er-do-well, but a very poor creature—a valetudinarian, "letting I dare not wait upon would" in his very escapades, a coward, a glutton, vain, weak, lazy, but with none of the nobler vices. If the thing had been better done we might have taken it for his humour; but the poorness of the verse,[3] with a Chaucerian flash or two such as—

Excess-at-board has laid his knife with me,

[1] The first two volumes of an edition have been issued by the E.E.T.S. under Dr. Furnivall's editorship.

[2] Edited for the Roxburghe Club by Wright in 1860, and E.E.T.S. 1897.

[3] Occleve, says Dr. Furnivall, "is content so long as he can count the syllables on his fingers." This is generous rather than severe.

is rather a warrant for truth. A singularly weak *Complaint of Our Lady before the Cross*, where the subject strikes no spark out of Occleve's flabby nature ; a feebly violent onslaught on Sir John Oldcastle and the Lollards ; certain *ballades*, pious or political, which are no *ballades* at all, Occleve being apparently too weak to keep up to the rhyme-and-refrain scheme, may be noticed. The *Letter of Cupid to Lovers* is a little better. Not so much can be said of *Occleve's Complaint* and *Occleve's Dialogue*, though the latter may have an attraction for some in its querulous garrulity. But the tale which it introduces—a versification from the *Gesta Romanorum* about the Emperor Jereslaus's wife—and a later *Story of Jonathas*, are not bad of their kind, while the poem which comes between them, and which is connected with all that have been mentioned since the *Complaint*, *Ars Utilissima sciendi mori*, is, in a different vein, their equal. It is, like most of the work of this time and of this poet, merely a translation, though of what original is not quite certain. But there is a much healthier and manlier tone in it than in the puling regrets of the *Male Règle* for wasted health and feeble follies gone. The fifteenth century thought much of Death, and the thought was here, as elsewhere, tonic. The whining poltroon of the retrospect of life faces the prospect of death with no sham philosophy, and if not without fear, yet in humility and faith.

For those, and perhaps only for those, who desire to appreciate at first hand the strange paralysis of humour and harmony, of grace and strength, which came upon the successors of Chaucer and Langland, it may be worth while to turn over the work of Osbern Bokenam (= probably Buckenham),[1] whose *Legends of the Saints*, in some 10,000 lines of decasyllables variously arranged in Chaucerian fashions, have had the very undeserved honour of two reprints,[2] chiefly, it would seem, because they represent the not very common dialect of Suffolk. Bokenam, who, as we learn from a note in the MS., was a Suffolk man, a Doctor of Divinity, and an Austin Friar of Stoke Clare, tells the lives of Saints Margaret, Anne, Christina, the Eleven Thousand, Faith, Agnes, Dorothy, Mary Magdalene, Katharine, Cecily, Agatha,[3] Lucy, and Elizabeth of Hungary, in verse of rather more smoothness than some of his contemporaries could manage, but of a *saltlessness*, an absence of flavour, sparkle, piquancy, bite, which is desperate and almost inconceivable. Not St. Margaret and the Dragon, not St. Katharine and the Wheel, not even that lovely legend of St. Dorothea, which might draw poetry from an expert in phonetics, can inspire

Bokenam.

[1] "Dr. Bokenham of Bury" occurs, however, in Roger North.

[2] By Stevenson for the Roxburghe Club, and by Horstmann (Heilbronn, 1883).

[3] "Agas" in the English, a form identical with the original of "haggis."

Bokenam with anything beyond the mildest prettiness of expression, and this he very seldom reaches. The most interesting thing in the whole book is the statement in the same end-note that Thomas Burgh had the poem copied in Cambridge in the year of Our Lord 1447, at the cost of thirty shillings—which sum can seldom have been either worse spent or more hardly earned either by town or gown in that locality.

Indeed, after making every allowance for the attempts, estimable if not delectable, of Lydgate and Occleve to keep English poetry alive during the first half of the fifteenth century, it is impossible not to be struck, not merely with the extremely moderate success of their own efforts, but with the paucity of any attempt to support them among their contemporaries. What we may call the Apocrypha of *Piers Plowman*, the *Creed*, and the *Tale* (*vide supra*) may belong to the beginning of this century as well as to the end of the last. So may the verses of the Shropshire poet, Audelay,[1] who, like Langland himself, was a reformer without being a Wyclifite. To the first quarter of the fifteenth century belong William of Nassington, a Yorkshire writer of sacred verse, who perhaps belongs to the tradition of Hampole; and Hugh Campden, another translator, the author of the moral romance of *Boctus and Sidrac*. The hapless Prince Edward, son of Henry VI. and Margaret of Anjou, before Clarence stabbed him in the field by Tewkesbury, underwent the minor pain of having a moral poem on the *Active Policy of a Prince* written for him by a certain George Ashby, Clerk of the Signet to his mother, and an aged Chaucerian. One of Caxton's books is a verse translation of Cato's *Morals*, by Benedict Burgh, done about 1470; and the last quarter saw some curious alchemical verses by George Ripley and Thomas Norton. But this, and perhaps a little more of the same kind, purely curious and appealing only to the robuster kind of curiosity, is all that bridges in England the space between Lydgate and Occleve in the early part of the fifteenth century, and Hawes and Skelton in the beginning of the sixteenth. There is, it is true, some anonymous matter of far greater interest which may represent this interval, and which will be dealt with in a later chapter. But even this is but scanty in amount.[2]

Audelay and Minors.

Very little is known of Stephen Hawes, and that little does not include the date either of his birth or of his death. He is said to

[1] Ed. Halliwell, Percy Society, 1844. A selection only. The MS. is dated 1426, and Audelay lived and wrote as late as the reign of Henry VI. He has "bob and wheel" stanzas, sometimes alliterated and sometimes not, Romance sixains, a system composed of triplet octosyllables separated by single lines, monorhymed throughout the poem, etc.

[2] I know the writers mentioned in this paragraph, after Audelay and Nassington, mainly at second hand. [*Fifth Edition.* This knowledge is now first hand throughout.]

have been a gentleman of birth, an Oxford man, a pretty considerable traveller, a master of modern languages, a man of great memory (seeing he could repeat by heart the works of Lydgate), and the possessor of a critical faculty somewhat smaller, inasmuch as he made that voluminous person equal in some respects with Geoffrey Chaucer. It is said with probability that he was Groom of the Chamber to Henry VII.; he was able to write verses to congratulate Henry VIII. on his accession; and it seems likely that he died in Suffolk in early middle age, certainly before 1530, and probably about 1523.

Hawes.

Wynkyn de Worde printed collections of the poems of Hawes—the *Pastime of Pleasure*, by which he is now almost solely known, in 1509, with some more pieces and the *Example of Virtue* in 1512. The *Pastime* was reprinted by Wright for the Percy Society,[1] unluckily with some omissions. Mr. Arber long ago promised a reprint of the *Example of Virtue*, the contents of which were abstracted in Mr. Henry Morley's *English Writers*.[2] The text has at last appeared in the *Dunbar Anthology*.[3] It is not nearly so long as the *Pastime*. Hawes has been said to belong to "the Provençal school," a statement, of course, entirely erroneous, and due to the confusion between Provençal and French, which was at one time excusable, but has long ceased to be so. He is, in fact, a Chaucerian who has deepened one particular colour of Chaucerism by recurrence to the *Romance of the Rose* itself, and still more to the heavier following of its allegory in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by French and English writers. The *Pastime of Pleasure*, or the history of Graund-Amour and La Bel Pucell, is, like Gavin Douglas's contemporary *King Hart*, simply an allegory of the life of man. The hero passes the meadow of Youth; chooses the path of Active Life, neglecting the Contemplative or Monastic; is introduced to the Seven Daughters of Doctrine (the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium*); meets La Bel Pucell, determines to obtain her, but is exposed to some danger by the misguidance of a comic slanderer of women, Godfrey Gobilive; destroys a three-headed giant and seven-headed ditto, so forcing his way to La Bel Pucell; is received by the Virtues, and married to his beloved by Law. He lives happily with her till Age strikes him with infirmities and the vice of Avarice. Contrition comes in time, however, before Death, and he is buried by Mercy and Charity and epitaphed by Fame.

The *Pastime of Pleasure*.

Thus presented in its bare scheme or skeleton, the poem may well seem (to use a Drydenian phrase) but a cool and insignificant thing. Nothing is more dead to us, hardly anything perhaps seems

[1] 1845. The Abbotsford Club added the short *Conversion of Swearers* in 1865.
[2] vii. 75-81.
[3] London, 1901, pp. 217-295.

more certain of no resurrection, than this bald yet childish form of allegory, which lacks alike the vivid passages, the attractive, dreamlike transformations, and the fiery intensity of Langland, the gorgeous romance of Spenser and his perfect poetic skill, the amiable humanity and vivid novel-interest of Bunyan. In the two last of these cases—perhaps even in the first—the allegory, though ever present, is present in the background; it will come when called, but does not obtrude itself; in Hawes it is pitilessly obtrusive at every step. Further, the poet is singularly ill provided with the means of his art. He is far from being such a "dull dog" as Occleve; he has perhaps more flashes of poetry than Lydgate. But either the venerable Wynkyn was false to the central principle of all good printing, "Follow copy even if it flies out of the window," or else Hawes was less able to keep up any standard of correct and musical versification than even these his predecessors. Both his rhymes-royal and his couplets (both are used in the *Pastime*) are subject to the strangest lapses, to fits of a kind of verse-giddiness or epilepsy.

The *Example of Virtue*, which is wholly in rhyme-royal, is a very much duller poem, perhaps because it is even more nakedly allegoric than the *Pastime of Pleasure*. The usual invocation of the unequal three—Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate—is followed by the usual dream. Youth is escorted by Discretion, voyages over the sea of Vain Glory to an island where are the castles of Justice, Nature, Fortune, Courage, and Wisdom; is engaged to Cleanness; is tempted by Lust, Avarice, and Pride; fights with a three-headed dragon (Hawes cannot spare the three-headed dragon); is new-dubbed Virtue; marries Cleanness, and is finally translated with her to Heaven. The three are once more invoked, and the poem ends. Of course, in both these poems there is a certain faint adumbration of the *Faërie Queen*—its outline without its glorious filling-in, its theme without its art, its intellectual reason for existence without any of its æsthetic justification thereof. It is not improbable that Spenser did know Hawes; but if so he owed him a very small royalty. The merit of this poet is that he manages occasionally to lighten his darkness with flashes, to refresh his desert with flowers, of by no means mediocre poetry. We owe to him one of the oldest forms, if not the oldest form, of the beautiful saying—

The *Example of Virtue*.

> Be the day weary, or be the day long,
> At length it draweth to evensong.

For which and other things he may be forgiven such intolerable matter as the following, which deserves its place as a general example of the worst side of fifteenth-century poetry:—

And if the matter be joyful and glad,
Like countenance outwardly they make ;
But moderation in their minds is had,
So that outrage may them not overtake.
I cannot write too much for their sake
Them to laud, for my time is short
And the matter long which I must report.
Pastime of Pleasure, cap. xii. last stanza.

It is between Hawes and Skelton that we may perhaps most conveniently mention a third writer, who is even more of a mere curiosity than Hawes himself, but as characteristic of his time as either.

Barclay.

This is Alexander Barclay,[1] the Englisher of the famous *Narrenschiff* of Sebastian Brandt. As far back as Bale's time (that is to say, in the age just after his own, and partly overlapping it) there was a doubt whether Barclay was a Scot or an Englishman. The spelling of his name would incline to the former hypothesis, which also has early authority of the positive kind ; but no connection of any sort is known between Barclay and Scotland, all his associations are with the South and South-west of England, and the spelling (always a very untrustworthy guide) is after all merely the pronounced form of " Berkeley." His literary qualities are scarcely such that the two divisions of the island need fight very keenly for him. He must have been born somewhere about the beginning of the last quarter of the fifteenth century, and pretty certainly had a University education. The only allusion traced in his work is to Cambridge,[2] but Scots more often went to Oxford, and Oxford had more connection with the West Country. He was certainly for some time chaplain of the College of St. Mary Ottery, in Devonshire (the future birthplace of Coleridge), and seems there to have translated the *Ship of Fools*,[3] which Pynson published in 1508, dedicated to Bishop Cornish of Exeter. He may have had poetical employment at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, was a monk at Ely, and after the dissolution of the monasteries obtained livings in Essex and Somerset under Edward VI., as well as later, just before his death in 1552, that of Allhallows, Lombard Street.

Barclay's work was extensive, but chiefly translated. He "did" Gringore's *Castle of Labour* before the *Ship*, and after it some more, though not wholly, original Eclogues, of which the *Citizen and*

[1] Warton has given a rather full account of Barclay (iii. 189-203, ed. 1871), and Ritson is as usual to the point in four pages of the *Bibliographia Poetica*. But the long introductions to the modern editions mentioned below are the things to consult.

[2] Trumpington, also mentioned, would prove nothing, because Chaucer had made it a place of literature.

[3] Very handsomely reprinted, with the woodcuts, by T. H. Jamieson (Edinburgh, 2 vols. 4to, 1874).

Uplandishman[1] is the one most easily accessible in full. Divers other works, some of them extant, are assigned to him, and he seems in one, *Contra Skeltonum*, to have made a formal onslaught on a poet at whom his existing poems contain more than one fling.

Barclay seems really to deserve the place of first Eclogue-writer in English, if any one cares for this fortuitous and rather futile variety of eminence. His Eclogues, moreover, are not merely rather more original, but deserve at least to be called less jejune than the *Ship*. This latter owes its fame partly to its rarity before the reprint referred to in Note above, partly to the famous and really admirable woodcuts which it contains. The first "fole"—the possessor of unprofitable books—has a certain savour of promise which is unluckily but seldom fulfilled afterwards. Still, mainly thanks to the illustrations and to the general sympathy with Puck in seeing and saying, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" it is possible to make one's way through the long catalogue which fills from two thousand to two thousand five hundred stanzas of rhyme-royal. The individual line is rather an interesting one, showing a sort of intermediate stage between the would-be rigid decasyllable of Lydgate and Occleve and the long rambling twelves or fourteeners of the mid-sixteenth-century poets. Sometimes Barclay permits himself a full Alexandrine; oftener (in fact, in the majority of cases) he lengthens out his line with trisyllabic feet, so arranged as sometimes to take very little keep of the iambic basis. This same line is found in the Eclogues, arranged mainly in couplets, but with insertions in stanza, such as the allegorical octaves describing the *Tower of Virtue* in the Fourth Eclogue. In the first three (paraphrased from Aeneas Silvius) the speakers are Coridon and Cornix, in the fourth Codrus and Menalcas, in the fifth (the *Citizen and Uplandishman* [countryman]) Augustus and Faustus. They have for almost pervading subject that rather monotonous grumbling at the vices, follies, and ingratitude of courts which was the natural result of the Tudor concentration of the fountains not merely of honour but of profit in the sovereign, and of which we find more than an echo in Spenser.

The Ship of Fools.

The Eclogues.

No more curious instance of literary contrast could possibly be provided than that which is supplied by the writer who is always coupled with Hawes, and sometimes with Barclay, his enemy. The birthplace of John Skelton[2] is given with the very sufficient variants of Cumberland and Norfolk; his birth-year

Skelton.

[1] Ed. Fairholt, Percy Society, 1847, with extracts from the others. The Spenser Society reprinted all, and *The Mirrour of Good Manners*, in black letter folio, 1885.

[2] Re-edited London, 1736; in Chalmers; and ed. Dyce, 1843.

must have been somewhere about 1460, and so in a not uninteresting way he takes up in the cradle the torch which Lydgate and Occleve dropped in the tomb. He was pretty certainly a Cambridge man, and was M.A. in 1484. His earliest poem is thought to be one on the death of Edward IV., which is noteworthy, like Dunbar's *Lament for the Makers*, for a Latin refrain, melancholy in tone. Caxton in 1490, and in the preface to his *Aeneid*, speaks of Skelton's scholarship with reverence, and tells us that he was Poet Laureate in the University of Oxford. This title, which Skelton also enjoyed from Louvain and Cambridge, has caused mistakes which seem even yet not to be universally cleared up. Perhaps it is too much to speak of it as a "degree"; it was rather, in old Oxford language, a "position" in rhetoric and poetics (then practically confounded) which necessitated a verse-thesis. It had nothing to do, except accidentally, with the modern sense of "Poet Laureate," which practically comes into existence with Ben Jonson and the seventeenth century.

Skelton seems to have been one of the numerous literary *protégés* of Lady Margaret and her son Henry VII.; he took orders in 1498, when he must have been no longer a young man, and was tutor to Henry VIII. At this time Erasmus follows Caxton as his encomiast. He became rector of Diss, in his (probably) native county, Norfolk, before 1504. Up to this time, when he was far advanced in middle life, he seems to have been continuously prosperous and well-reputed. He lived twenty-five years longer, during which he became a complete Ishmaelite. The beginning of his trouble seems to have been that he married. At any rate he was suspended for this offence (or perhaps not for marriage at all) at some time not clearly known, and seems to have gone to London. The King favoured his old tutor, but either from jealousy or sheer quarrelsomeness, or, as his partisans maintain, reforming zeal, he fell foul of Wolsey, whose friend he had previously been. A series of satires on the minister made it necessary for Skelton to take refuge in the sanctuary of Westminster, where he died in 1529, probably near his full term of days, and only a year before the former friend, now foe, on whom his pupil, and Wolsey's master, somewhat ungratefully revenged him.

His life.

One point which distinguishes nearly, not quite, all Skelton's verse from that of Hawes is that it is thoroughly alive. The *Crown of Laurel*, a stately, sterile, eminently fifteenth-century piece, mainly in rhyme-royal and aureate language, does indeed meet us in the forefront of his work and inspire doubt and dread—

> Aulus Gellius, that noble historian,
> Orace also with his newe poetry,
> Master Terence, the famous comicar,

are lines likely to "strike a chill." But if Skelton was not equal to "new poetry" himself, he could at any rate rebel against the old; if he could not write musically, he could at any rate take refuge in the doggerel of talent and almost of genius. Even this very poem, with its addresses to various young ladies of high birth, contains, in the short staccato metres that Skelton loved—to Margaret Hussey ("Merry Margaret As Midsummer flower"), to Isabel Pennell ("My maiden Isabel, Whose mammy and whose daddy Brought forth a goodly baby"), to Gertrude Statham ("Mistress Gertrude, With Womanhood Endued"),—very pleasant examples of better things. The *Bouge of Court* retains the dim and dreary personages—Dread, Suspicion, Disdain, Favell, etc.—of allegory.

His poems.

The real Skelton, taking the order of his works as usually printed, emerges first in a very long, very boisterous, very rude, and in part rather childish and ignoble, but curiously spirited and fresh, ballad of triumph over the Duke of Albany, who ran away shamefully with a hundred thousand "tratland Scots and faint-hearted Frenchmen" beside the water of Tweed. Here—in almost the shortest possible lines, anapæstic in general character and for the most part of two feet only, rhymed in couplet, and with language sometimes almost inarticulate in its bubbling volubility, strongly alliterated, using the repeated beginning of the line freely—Skelton crows and whoops at the defeated enemy with a heartiness that may not be chivalrous, but is certainly unfeigned. *Speak Parrot*, in rhyme-royal, is an odd mixture of the author's favourite half-gibberish doggerel with "aureate" language and "rhethorike"—indeed, it is impossible not to see a deliberate satire on the second in both constituents. The above-mentioned *Dirge on Edward IV.* is, of course, quite serious, couched in twelve-line stanzas of decasyllables decidedly Occlevian in their character, with the refrain *Quia ecce nunc in pulvere dormio. Against the Scots*, a song of triumph for Flodden, is a duplication of the other crow, but rather more ignoble because the triumph and the tragedy were both greater. This is partly in "Skeltonics," partly in octosyllables. *Ware the Hawke!* is pure doggerel satire; and then a few serious pieces introduce us to what is perhaps Skelton's most vigorous, though certainly not his most elegant, work, the *Tunning of Eleanor Rumming*. This is a more than Hogarthian sketch, in language which might make Swift or Smollett squeamish, of the brewing and drinking of a certain browst of ale by a country ale-wife and her customers. It is wholly in the Skeltonian dimeter or monometer, which, it should be observed, has a tendency now and then to fall into six-syllabled iambics or seven-syllabled trochaics for longer or shorter breaks, the centre of the verse shifting precisely in the same fashion as in the *Genesis and Exodus* or *Christabel* metre,

of which, in fact, this is undoubtedly a shortened and doggerelised variant for satiric purposes. In this form it pervades Skelton's two chief political satires against Wolsey, *Why come ye not to Court* and the *Book of Colin Clout*, as well as the *Book of Philip Sparrow*, his most whimsical and graceful thing, a long desultory mourning for the pet bird of Mistress Joan Scrope.

In these, and in Skelton's minor poems, the chief of which are a *Lament on the Death of the Earl of Northumberland* and a morality called *Magnificence*, we see a fertile, restless, and ingenious spirit entirely unprovided with the proper means of expression, and just falling short of the intelligence and originality necessary to elaborate such means for itself. It is impossible not to recognise in the "Skeltonics" an attempt, crude and clumsy it is true, to get away from the intolerable dulness and dryness of the stanza-decasyllable, as it appears in Hawes and the earlier fifteenth-century poets. To this day it is difficult to see why this fit of stuttering should have come upon English. At the beginning and at the end of the 150 years of it (to pass over Skelton's younger contemporaries Wyatt and Surrey for reasons) we find Chaucer before and Sackville afterwards making the seven or eight-lined stanza decasyllables the instrument of music, sweet or stately, merry or sorrowful, at their pleasure and with no sort of difficulty. Between them (to borrow a phrase from Mr. Swinburne of another matter) it seems almost impossible for an English poet to "clear his mouth of pebbles and his brow of fog."

Probably at no time would Skelton have been a great poet in the serious and passionate way—probably, at all, his genius would have inclined to comedy and to satire. As it is, he holds a position with Butler as the chief English verse-writer who has deliberately preferred to be burlesque to the verge, and in his case considerably over the verge, of grotesque and doggerel. In comparing the two men, whose powers, natural and acquired, do not seem to have been very different, while their tempers were also not dissimilar (Skelton inclining rather to the jovial, Butler to the saturnine), it is impossible not to remember that Butler came just after, as Skelton came just before, the enormous, the incalculable advances made by the Elizabethan period, not merely in language and metre, but in everything, small and great, that pertains to the business of poetry. And we ought to give the author of *Philip Sparrow* and *Eleanor Rumming* and *Why come ye not to Court* a substantial allowance for the fact.

CHAPTER II

THE SCOTTISH POETS—HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND MINOR

Lateness of Scottish Literature—Barbour—Wyntoun—Blind Harry—Minors—Lyndsay—His life—His works—The *Satire of the Three Estates*—Minor poems.

ALTHOUGH the literary eminence of the quartette of poets who will be discussed in the next chapter is unquestioned, even the earliest of them (taking him to have been James the First) was not the first known poet of Scotland. That position, assigned by tradition or imagination, first to Thomas of Erceldoune, and then to the still more shadowy "Huchowne," belongs historically to John Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen, and author of the *Brus*, which was finished in 1375. The reasons of this extraordinary lateness, and the still more extraordinary lagging of prose (of which, except laws, letters, and a few translations,[1] etc., we have nothing till the *Complaint of Scotland* hard on the middle of the sixteenth century), are too conjectural to be argued out here. Attention can only be called to the following facts, which (though some of them are even now sometimes attacked) are absolutely indisputable. They are these: that the establishment of a separate kingdom in any sense corresponding to what we call Scotland was very late; that this kingdom when established consisted of, or rested on, the *débris* of four different nationalities and languages — those of the Picts, of the Scots of Dalriada, of the Britons of Strathclyde, and of the Anglo-Danes of Northumbria; that the literary chances of the last, where only an English literature could have arisen, were ruined by the Danish invasion, and not recovered till, after the Norman conquest of England, English was everywhere undergoing a process of moulting which made literature impossible; that even in the comparatively halcyon times of the Alexanders, English (all the Scottish writers up to Douglas invariably call their language

Lateness of Scottish Literature.

[1] The Scots New Testament (S.T.S.) is not earlier than 1520, nor Bellenden's *Livy* than 1533; but Sir Gilbert Hay's version of *L'Arbre des Batailles* (S.T.S.) goes back to 1456; and a certain "John of Ireland" to 1490.

"Inglis," and if they use "Scots" at all, mean Gaelic by it) was yet unformed; and that from the latter half of the thirteenth to the latter half of the fourteenth century the War of Independence, and the turbulent state in which Scotland emerged from it, made literature improbable, if not actually impossible.

At any rate, whether it be strange or not, that we have nothing earlier than Barbour, the author of the *Brus*,[1] is a fact and indisputable. His identification with the Archdeacon rests on the testimony of his immediate successor, Wyntoun, and of the Archdeacon we have divers documentary notices. These do not include the date or place of his birth. The former is guessed at as about 1320. Our first notice of him is thirty-seven years later, when in 1357 Edward III. granted him license to come, with three scholars, to Oxford to study, to stay there and exercise scholastic acts, and to return to Scotland, where, it must be remembered, there was as yet no University. Seven years later he had a similar safe-conduct to the same place, and at other times others to go to France, also for the sake of study. The other references, which are numerous, refer chiefly to payments of pensions, etc., and do not concern literature. He died in March 1395.

Barbour.

Besides the *Brus* there have of late years been assigned to Barbour, and taken away from him by turns, a fragment of a Troy Book and a very large collection of *Lives of the Saints*.[2] In dialect and metre these are similar to the *Brus* itself; but they are naturally less interesting, being simply members of a very large class, and treating common matter in common form, while the *Brus* stands quite by itself. Even as a historical document—though it takes some remarkable liberties with fact, confusing Bruce with his own grandfather, making him refuse an offer of the crown from Edward, etc.—it is not despicable. It was written (we have the exact date in a passage of its own) less than fifty years after Bruce's death, and by a man who was probably nearly ten years old at the date of that death, so that he had ample opportunity for communication with direct witnesses. That Barbour takes, as every mediæval writer, almost without exception, invariably did take, license of embellishing, altering, supplying, omitting, to suit his own notions of the story, is not so much probable as certain, but it is not material. As a poet, Barbour, if not taking very high rank, is very far indeed from being despicable. His famous and often-quoted outburst about freedom does not seem to be, by any means, a mere commonplace, and many of his descriptive passages (the pursuit of Bruce by John of Lorn being only one

[1] Frequently edited. The Scottish Text Society's issue by Professor Skeat (Edinburgh, 1894) is the one I have used.

[2] Also in the Scottish Text Society's issues. Ed. Metcalfe, Edinburgh, 1896.

of them) fully rise to the level required. It would be absurd to compare Barbour to Chaucer or to Langland, but, with a little less elegance, he has more spirit than Gower.

Poetry was not the strong point of his younger contemporary and immediate successor in the verse-chronicling of Scottish history, Andrew Wyntoun, Canon of St. Andrews and Prior of St. Serf in Lochleven. His birth- and death-dates are not known, but he certainly held his priory from 1395 (Barbour's death-year) to 1413 at least; and he was alive six years later, for he notices the death of Robert Duke of Albany in 1419. 1350-1420 would therefore (as he speaks of old age having mastered him) be a probable life-date. The title of "Original Chronicle" which he gave to his work[1] does not, as Dr. Irving[2] seems rather oddly to have thought, claim "originality" in our common modern sense —indeed Wyntoun very frankly quotes many authors down to Barbour. It signifies that he began at the beginning—*origo*—after the wont of the mediæval chronicler. His verse is less poetical than Barbour's in spirit but a little more accomplished in form, attaining the trisyllabic swing of the *Christabel* metre sometimes with very good effect, as witness the line in his often-quoted account of Macbeth and the Weird Sisters— Wyntoun.

Lo! yon | der the thane | of Crum | bauchty | [Cromarty].

And another in reference to the Maid of Norway—

To Nor | way and Scot | land both right | wise heir.

He has not a few passages interesting for matter—as far as manner goes the interview between the Devil and St. Serf (Book v. chap. xii.) is a very fair specimen. It is from him that we have the well-known and interesting piece "When Alexander our King was dead," which, however, can hardly be contemporary with the event it commemorates.

The transition, from Wyntoun's easy amble of manner (not seldom degenerating into a mere pedestrian verse) and his placid chronicling, to the next writer on this special list is not a little curious. Barbour had been patriotic beyond all dispute, and he had not been over-squeamish about dressing up the facts of history to better advantage in the garb of romance. Wyntoun, with more sense of history, had been patriotic too; but neither showed any violent animosity against England, and an Englishman must compare with some compunction the international courtesy of Laurence Minot Blind Harry.

[1] Edited in part by D. Macpherson (1795) and in whole by Laing (1872-79). A thorough revision has since been made by Mr. Amours for the S.T.S.

[2] *History of Scottish Poetry*, p. 116.

and theirs. Both were cosmopolitan, and the method of Barbour himself was rigidly critical, as compared with Blind Harry,[1] or, as modern punctilio prefers to call him, "Henry the Minstrel," the poetical biographer of the other great hero of the War of Independence. The author himself is a very obscure person. The *locus classicus* about him is a passage of the same Latin-writing historian, John Mair or Major, who is our authority for the authorship of the *King's Quair*. Mair says that Henricus, blind from his birth, executed the poem in his (the historian's) infancy, which is judged to have been *cir.* 1460. We have only one MS. of it, and that is dated 1488, while we have some records of payments to Henry as late as 1492, and Dunbar includes him among the Dead Makers in 1508. The last three-quarters of the fifteenth century would therefore seem to have been his date; and the text of his poem, if not directly taken down from his dictation, to have been at least contemporary.

Sir William Wallace consists of nearly 12,000 lines in heroic couplets, often very spirited, and generally correct enough in construction, but observing the sharp French cæsura at the fourth syllable. It purports to be based on a Latin book by John Blair, Wallace's own chaplain; but no such book is known to have existed, nor is it referred to by any authority, except such as have obviously derived their knowledge from Harry himself. Nor does it need more than the slightest examination of the poem to see that it is in substance, though not in form, a true *chanson de geste*, having only the remotest foundation in history, and weaving its story perhaps out of some popular traditions, but mainly out of the poet's own head or the heads of his unknown predecessors. It is well known that the authentic documents for Wallace's history are extremely meagre. Barbour never mentions his name. But Wyntoun, long before Harry, says that great *gestes* of him existed, and suggests that a "great buke" (the opposition is not unnoteworthy) might be written. It is by no means improbable that Blind Harry took the hint directly from the good prior of St. Serf. By his time the national animosity between Scots and English, according to a custom odd at first sight but not unintelligible, had grown much more fierce than during the actual Wars of Independence in the previous century. And Harry's verses are inspired by the hottest flame of this. The presence of indignation and the absence of information combine in him to make an exceedingly spirited romance, which was naturally and deservedly popular in Scotland from the very first, but which, of course, has the slightest—if the slightest—pretence to historical importance. The ghostly apparition of Faw-

[1] Scottish Text Society, ed. Moir.

done, in the finest passage of all, is not more a thing of the imagination than the still more famous fishing story with which the poem opens, or the stock incident (very freshly and excellently told) of the visit of the Queen of England to Wallace, and her mediation with her no less cowardly than ferocious husband. But it was all perfectly right and proper, according to the laws of the class of composition to which Blind Harry's work belongs; and it is a compensation for the extreme lateness and comparative scantiness of Scottish literature that it was thus able to produce the latest, and very far indeed from the worst, example of the national folk-epic which blends traditions of all sorts, adds commonplaces from the general stock of fiction, and makes the whole thick and slab with original sauce, in order to exalt and consecrate the deeds of a popular hero.

It may be not inconvenient here, before coming to the last of the batch of historical poets or verse-writers who form the staple of this chapter, and who in this case extend beyond the fifteenth century proper, to note very briefly the minor poets of this and the other class who complete the list of the makers of the fifteenth century itself, as we have them on the authority of Dunbar and others. The chief of these was Walter Kennedy, Dunbar's contemporary and antagonist in the "flyting" (*vide infra*), who took his degree at Glasgow in 1476, and is spoken of not as dead but dying in the *Complaint of the Makers*, published therewith. There are poems of Kennedy's in existence, but mostly unpublished, and said to be of no great merit. Others who are not mere names are Richard, or Sir Richard Holland, a Douglas's man, who wrote about the middle of the century the *Book of the Howlat*,[1] alliterated and rhymed, describing a general council of the Birds, with the Peacock as Pope-President; and Clerk of Tranent, who is spoken of as having made the "Anturs of Gawane" (*vide supra*). To him may be due the existing *Golagros and Gawane*, an alliterative rhymed poem of the Gawain Northern cycle (*ante*, p. 103, and *post*, p. 195). Mersar, two Rowls or Rolls, and others are but shadows, and only a single poem seems to remain by Quentin Shaw, a poet who is not only mentioned by Dunbar, but picturesquely introduced by Gawain Douglas— Minors.

Quentin with ane huttock[2] on his head—

[1] This is in the Scottish Text Society's *Alliterative Poems*, ed. Amours. Everybody knows the two short lines—

O Douglas, Douglas, Tender and true!

which end the wheel of stanza 31, and the whole passage dealing with Lord James and the heart of the Bruce is good. Otherwise not much can be said for the poem, which is a mere variation of the *Parliament of Fowls*.

[2] *i.e.* a hood, probably like that in Chaucer's portrait, and copied from it by fifteenth-century poets, as those of the eighteenth copied Pope's nightcap.

as one of the Scottish poets worthy to show cause against even Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate. And to the poets who are thus without, or nearly without, poems, a list of poems at present unattached to poets might be added, showing more evidence of the literary working in Scotland which began so late and was to die away, all but completely, so soon.

It is probable that among these forgotten, scarcely known, and too often still disdained writers, there was more than one who was a better poet in the strict sense of that term than "Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount, Lord Lyon King of Arms," who, at the cost of a slight stretch of chronology, may best be mentioned here. But Lyndsay is an interesting, and though not a fully yet a fairly known personality, while they flit as shadows; he has left an abundant supply of work,[1] frequently interesting in itself, and generally characteristic of his time; and in one particular he has the rare good luck to have left the only example, not merely in Scottish but in English literature, of an early *sotie* or political farce-satire in dramatic form. If he had given us nothing but the *Satire of the Three Estates*, Lyndsay would be a remarkable figure in English literature; as it is, he has left much else

Lyndsay.

He is supposed, rather than known, to have been born at The Mount, near Cupar, in Fife, somewhere about 1490; but claims (also guesswork) have been put in for Garmylton or Garleton in East Lothian, an estate which certainly belonged to his father and to him. The family was an offshoot (whether legitimate or not is uncertain) of that of Lyndsay of the Byres. He may, rather than must, have been the "Da. Lyndsay" who was an incorporated fourth-year student at St. Andrews in 1508-9. He certainly had not merely a regular salary in the Royal Household, but a "play-coat of blue and yellow taffety" in 1511, and played before King James IV. and Queen Margaret. He is said to have been present at the famous scene of the apparition to the King before Flodden, which is enshrined in *Marmion*. And he was master-usher, or master of the household, to James V. from his earliest childhood. In 1522 he was a married man, and his wife Janet Douglas was accustomed to sew the King's "sarkis" with double hanks of gold thread. James's very early nominal coming of age at his twelfth year caused the removal of Lyndsay, who retired to his estate of Garmylton and "commenced poet." But four years later James emancipated himself from his still real tutelage to Angus, and almost at once promoted his old master to knighthood and the office of Lyon King, which then involved very important diplomatic duties.

His life.

[1] Ed. Laing, Edinburgh. 3 vols. 1879.

In discharge of these Lyndsay went to England, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark. He held a chapter of his heralds in January 1555, and seems to have died between that month and the following April.

Lyndsay's works consist of the above-mentioned *Satire of the Three Estates*, of a *Dialogue between Experience and a Courtier*, and of the *History of Squire Meldrum*, all long poems, with a considerable number of shorter ones. Of the long poems, *The Dialogue* (or *The Monarchie*) consists of more than 6000 lines, chiefly octosyllabic couplets, and gives the history of the world, with comments in the dismallest manner of the fifteenth century. The *History of Squire Meldrum*, in the same metre, is an exceedingly pleasant romantic biography of a real person, a sort of cross between Quentin Durward and the Admirable Crichton, whose prowess against Englishmen and others in the field, and his courtesy to ladies in the bower, are very lovingly depicted. The most noteworthy of the three, however, (though, in common with Lyndsay's other poems, it is disfigured by the extraordinary coarseness of language which marks most of this early Scottish poetry, and which, except for a very brief time at the Restoration, and then chiefly in anonymous writings, has never been matched in England), is the *Satire*. This, as its length, not far short of 5000 lines, makes inevitable, is not a single piece, but, on the model of the French compositions, which no doubt suggested it, a set or pentalogy of five different pieces: the first part of the play proper, the First and Second Interludes, the second part of the play, and the Third Interlude, while there is a preliminary interlude of between two and three hundred lines more which has been thought spurious, but with no apparent reason, and which is certainly not less vigorous than the rest, though it is if possible even coarser.

His works.

The *Satire of the Three Estates.*

The main play is a "morality" of the familiar kind (see next Book), but with the allegory deflected from its usual ethical tenor to a political bent, Rex Humanitas being tempted by Wantonness, Placebo, and the Vices in the habit of Friars, and saved by Correction, Gude Counsel, and the Virtues. It is in the second part that the Three Estates make a direct appearance; while the Interludes, not losing sight of the moral, enforce it with more farcical and general satire. It has been customary to regard Lyndsay as a partisan of the Reformation, and so, in the merely literal and grammatical sense, he certainly was. But it does not appear very certain that he was a partisan from any doctrinal side.

This sharp satire on abuses in Church and State, perhaps mixed, as satire so often is, with some selfish consideration, appears

also in all, or almost all, Lyndsay's minor poems, which, if not over numerous, are very interesting. They scarcely reach a dozen in number, and, as has been said, grace of poetic style and thought is by no means their prominent characteristic. But they all have a certain accomplishment of phrase and form which is extremely noteworthy in contrast with the staggering state of English in both ways at the time, and more noteworthy still when we remember that the Scottish Muse was about to fall almost barren for centuries, while the English was in some fifty years' time to become the fruitful mother of the best poetry in the world. And they are all interesting, more or less, in matter. The *Dream* (which is in plain language a begging letter to the King) is in rhyme-royal, and the body of it is simply part of that vast and dreary common form of fifteenth-century allegory through which, as throughout this Book, we have to make our way. But the begging letter by itself has some very interesting biographical touches, reminding James how his master-usher had carried him in his arms and tucked him up in bed; how he had told him not merely "of Hercules the actis honorabill," and much other improving matter, but the Prophecies of Rymour, Beid, and Marlyng, and tales of the Red Etin and the Gyre Carling, for which posterity would very cheerfully give twenty *Dialogues between Experience and a Courtier.* The *Dream* itself ranges from the centre of the Earth (*i.e.* Hell) and the description of Paradise, to the relations between France and Scotland and the state of Argyle and the Out Isles, which would appear not to have been Paradise at all. The piece, with all its parts included, considerably exceeds 1000 lines, and ends with a direct Exhortation to the King's Grace (in nine-line stanzas, with a different one as *coda*) which is manly and sensible. In fact, both Dunbar and Lyndsay deserve the highest credit for the absence of "assentation" in their addresses to their patrons, James the Fourth and Fifth, though neither father nor son seems to have profited very much thereby.

Minor poems.

This manly tone is renewed in the *Complaint of Sir David Lyndsay*—some 500 lines in octosyllabic couplets—which is again biographical and again suppliant, but does not hesitate to mingle probably unpalatable advice with supplication. Nor is the *Testament and Complaint of the Papyngo* (the King's Parrot), which is about the length of the *Dream*, and chiefly, but not wholly, in rhyme-royal, very different, being directed largely against various abuses in Church and State, especially the former. The *Answer to the King's Flyting* (the *Flyting* itself is lost) partakes of the studied coarseness of this singular form of poetical amusement. But Lyndsay's practical honesty makes him still more attentive to warning the "Red Tod of St. Andrews" against vice and disorder than to exercises in curious

ribaldry. Another court poem, probably not without special meaning, is the *Petition* of the King's old hound "Bagsche" to his successors in favour, Bawtie and others, for "ane portion in Dunfermling," concluding with good advice. The poet's most important attempt in pathetic poetry, the *Deploration of Queen Magdalene*, the fair and ill-fated French princess who was James's first wife, and to whom the climate of Scotland was almost at once fatal, is meritorious but hardly successful, Lyndsay being unable to extract from the rhyme-royal that plangent note which it so readily yields to true poets. He is happier, though still not consummately happy, in the comic handling of the *Justing between Watson and Barbour* and the *Supplication in Contempt of Side Tails* (trains), as well as in the rather famous anti-clerical *Kitty's Confession*, to which the *Description of Peddar Coffis*[1] is a kind of pendant. Lastly has to be mentioned the *Tragedy of the Cardinal*, a ferocious attack on the dead Beaton in the style of the *Fall of Princes*.

[1] *i.e.* "pedlar knaves," in senses both literal and transferred.

CHAPTER III

THE FOUR GREAT SCOTTISH POETS

The *King's Quair*—Henryson—The *Testament and Complaint of Creseide*—The *Fables—Robene and Makyne*—Minor poems—Dunbar—*The Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo*—Other large poems—Gawain Douglas—His life—His original poems—His *Aeneid*.

It has constantly been remarked as a most curious and partially unaccountable phenomenon, that while Chaucerian poetry, as soon as Chaucer's own hands failed, gave nothing but third-rate work or worse in England, it produced in Scotland work in some cases of very high quality indeed. Such account as is possible of the reasons for the general lateness of purely Scottish literature has been given in the last chapter. In this we shall give an account of the four chiefs of Scottish poetry when it did come—James the First, Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, and Gawain or Gavin Douglas.

Criticism of the strenuously inert kind has played its usual games with the literary work of James Stewart, first king of the name in Scotland. After by turns attributing to him and taking away from him *Christ's Kirk on the Green*, *Peebles to the Play*, etc., it has recently attacked his claims, which for nearly four centuries had been undisturbed, on the *Kingis Quair* itself. Once more this history does not trouble itself with otiosities of the kind. It is sufficient that the *Kingis Quair* (*quire*, book) is attributed to James by John Major or Mair, not an impeccable historian, but fairly near the time, and likely to know; that it is also given as his in the MS., which seems to be still more nearly contemporary; that no other attribution of the poem has any early authority; and that nothing is to be gained by disturbing the accepted tradition. It is indeed unwise to try, as other freaks of the same tricksy spirit have done, to force the dramatic details of the poem too closely, or closely at all, into line with the historical events of James's life, or to insist that the locality of the poem is Windsor, the heroine Joan Beaufort, and so forth. For us it shall be sufficient that the unbroken and till now unopposed tradi-

tion of four centuries has given the *Kingis Quair*[1] to James the First of Scotland, and that though we cannot say on positive evidence that he did write it, absolutely no facts have been produced showing that he did not. With regard to *Christ's Kirk on the Green* and *Peebles to the Play*, two very lively and spirited, though slightly coarse, narrative ballads of a "Burnsish" cast, the case is different. Early attribution hesitates—a fatal thing—between James the *First* and James the *Fifth* as the author of *Christ's Kirk on the Green*, and its tone is much more suggestive of the "goodman of Ballengeich" than of his fierce but knightly great-great-grandfather. Also, though it is very difficult to speak of the older Scots with any certainty, the language certainly seems more recent than the early fifteenth century.

The *King's Quair*.

On the contrary, the *King's Quair*, if not by James, must be by some unknown Scottish poet who was under the fresh and full Chaucerian influence. This James would naturally have been, seeing that he was born in 1394, captured at sea by the English in 1405, and kept in an honourable captivity in England till 1424, in which year, having married Joan Beaufort, Henry V.'s first cousin, he was allowed to ransom himself and return to Scotland. There he was crowned at Scone, ruled his turbulent realm with some justice, considerable ability and love of learning, and very great harshness, till 1436, when he was assassinated by not quite unreasonably wrathful rebels in the monastery of the Black Friars at Perth, despite (or not) of the heroism of "Kate Barlass." There was, if a slight variation of dialect, a complete unity of literary sentiment between England and Scotland at the time, and the increasing study of the French *rhétoriqueurs* had not yet, as it was to do in Scotland even more than in England, *aureated* the vocabulary with too cumbrous a garment of brocaded diction. The piece, which is in stanzas of rhyme-royal (said indeed to be so named from it), has the drawbacks from which even Chaucer's own minor poems are not free, of the common form of the *Rose* tradition—the sleep, the dream, the vision of Paganly divine personages, the Deadly Sins, the Wheel of Fortune, and the rest. It has none of the direct dramatic faculty of Chaucer in the *Tales* or of Dunbar, none of the intense romantic power of Henryson's *Creseide*, or the idyllic grace of his *Robene and Makyne*. But it has very much of the dreamy elegance of the *Rose* itself, in the passages describing how the weary dreamer looks out into the castle garden, and sees the gracious apparition of his love with golden hair,

[1] Ed. Skeat, Scottish Text Society. The arguments against James's authorship have been carefully examined and replied to by M. Jusserand; but it was really unnecessary, for not one of them is even plausible.

tricolour plumes in it, and a single ruby glowing on her breast; the interview with Venus (that which follows with Minerva is a little owlish); the fine episode of Fortune; and the final boon of red gilly-flowers brought him by the bird of Venus, the turtle-dove, with an encouraging inscription on the leaves. On the whole, if *The Flower and the Leaf* be not Chaucer's, it and the *King's Quair* may be ranked as the two most graceful, scholarly, and elegant poems of the French-Chaucerian tradition to be found in English. The *Ballad of Good Counsel*, which is also ascribed by good authority to James, and is the only other piece bearing such attribution, is also, though in another kind, strongly Chaucerian, its refrain being—

And for ilk inch He will thee quit a span,

and breathes the same mixture of pious humility and moral wisdom which appears in *Flee from the Press*, etc. Both pieces, the *Quair* and the *Ballad*, are thus distinctly "school-work," owing almost everything, as far as mere originality goes, to Chaucer. But they are school-work of the best kind, standing to their masters as Luini's to Lionardo's in painting, and showing the highest ability in execution.

Few poets whose personality is certain, and whose work is both eminent in merit and not inconsiderable in bulk, have a more shadowy record than Master Robert Henryson, schoolmaster in Dunfermline, as he is entitled in editions of his work printed some sixty or seventy years after his death. It may, in fact, be said that Dunbar's reference to that death in the *Complaint of the Makers*, which was written about 1506—

Henryson.

In Dunfermline he has done down,
Good Master Robert Henryson[1]—

is the only certain and positive reference that we possess to him. For it is not certain, though it is highly probable, that he is the Venerabilis vir Magister Robertus Henryson who was incorporated in the University of Glasgow (then scarcely ten years old) in 1462; and all attempts to identify him with the Henrysons or Hendersons of Fordell in Fife have quite failed.

About his works,[2] however, there is no reasonable doubt. They consist of two poems of some length, the *Testament of Creseide* and *Orpheus and Eurydice;* of a collection, with prologue, of Aesopic fables in Scots; and of rather more than a dozen miscellaneous minor poems, of which the chief is the somewhat famous *pastourelle*

[1] Readings vary.

[2] Ed. Laing (Edinburgh, 1865). Professor Gregory Smith has issued (1906) the first vol. of a new edition for the Scottish Text Society.

of *Robene and Makyne*. The total bulk is not large, but the merit is, for the fifteenth century more particularly, very high, and the variety of the directions in which it is shown is extremely remarkable. Of the two long poems, *Orpheus and Eurydice* is partly in rhyme-royal, partly in couplets, with a *ballade* in ten-line stanzas interposed and a "morality" in couplets. If it stood alone it would not create any very special position for its author. There are much better Middle English poems on the same subject; and this is only a fair Chaucerian exercise, not better than the best of Lydgate, though much better than the worst of Occleve.

Very different is the *Testament of Creseide*[1] (sometimes subdivided into a "complaint" and a "testament" proper), which undertakes to complete Chaucer's *Troilus*, and, not adopting the story of the jilted prince's speedy death, to give that of Cressida's punishment. After a vigorous prologue, describing how the poet in middle age, and a cold night, mended the fire, "beikit him about," "tuik ane drink his spirits to comfort," and a book, the *Troilus*— The *Testament and Complaint of Creseide.*

To cut the winter night and make it short—

he resolves to tell the sequel. Diomed, satiated with Cressida, deserts her as she has deserted his rival. She takes refuge with her father, Calchas, and will not show herself in public, but in "ane secret oratoir" angrily reproaches Venus and her son. Cupid, highly indignant, summons the council of the Gods[2] to determine the punishment for this blasphemy, and it is referred to a committee consisting of Saturn and the Moon. Little mercy is to be expected from these two cold deities; and there is singular force in the description of the sentence pronounced by Saturn. Passing down where careful Cressid lay, and placing a frosty wand on her head, he deprives her of all beauty and joy. Cynthia strikes her in addition with the incurable and loathsome signs of leprosy. The doom takes effect at once, and she has to seek the spital-house, where (in a nine-lined stanza) she makes her complaint. One of her wretched companions, not unkindly, bids her make virtue of necessity, give up useless wailing,

And live efter the law of lipper-*leid* (=*folk*).

So she goes forth with clapper and begging-dish. As she sits forlorn by the wayside, a gallant company rides by from Troy,

[1] This can be found in Chalmers's *Poets* and in Professor Skeat's Chauceriana.

[2] It is not superfluous to say that Mercury is "full of rhetoric," and has "a *hude* Like to ane Poeit of the auld fashioun"; see note on Quentin Shaw in the last chapter.

Troilus among them. And then comes the crowning passage of the poem. Their eyes meet; but her bleared vision does not recognise her former lover, and it is impossible for him to know Cressida in the ghastly creature beneath him. The stanzas describing this situation are nearly perfect. She receives his guerdon, is told by one of her comrades who he is, utters one last complaint, and sending him a ruby ring he had once given her, dies.

The two great passages of the doom of Saturn and the meeting would of itself give this poem rank with, if not above, the best work of its century, but the whole is not unworthy of them. Only in Sackville is the power of tragic effect which rhyme-royal eminently possesses brought out with equal fulness, and Sackville is less terrible than the Saturn piece, and less pathetic than the lovers' meeting.

The powers of this remarkable stanza in the lighter way are not generally held to be as high as those in serious verse; indeed, its great inventor or naturaliser in English usually deserted it for octosyllables or heroics when he was bent on comedy. But Henryson has been not much less happy in his use of it for Aesop than in the *Creseide* poem. His prologue is again personal, though less vivid; his fables are—The Cock and the Jasp (jasper); The Uplandish Mouse and the Burgess Mouse; a Fox series—Sir Chantecleer and the Fox, The Fox confessing to the Wolf, The Parliament of Beasts; The Dog, Sheep, and Wolf; The Lion and the Mouse; The Preaching of the Swallow; The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger; The Fox, the Wolf, and the Moon's Shadow; The Wolf and the Wether; The Wolf and the Lamb; The Paddock (Frog) and the Mouse. Many of these are told at considerable length, extending to some hundreds of lines, and the *moralitas* of each, as we should expect in this most moralising of all centuries, is prolonged to forty, fifty, sixty, or even more lines, but the general treatment is not at all heavy.

The *Fables.*

There is, however, no doubt that *Robene and Makyne* = Malkin ("Maudkin" not "Marykin," as is sometimes said), the best known of Henryson's poems from its fortunate inclusion in Percy's *Reliques*, is, if not the best, superior to all except the *Testament.* It is the Old French *pastourelle*, or shepherdess wooing-poem, with a difference. In the first part the usual order of things is inverted, and Makyne woos in vain the impassible and clownish object of her love. She is, in fact, "*Merry* Makyne" by grace of the perpetual epithet only. But the God of Love avenges her: the moonlight and the "sweet season" work on Robin, and he in turn solicits her favour. But she has been heard and healed, and every fit reader of the poem has praised the simple, but inimitably felicitous touches with which, in no undignified spirit

Robene and Makyne.

of "tit for tat," but with the straightforwardness of the heart-whole, and not without a touch of solemnity, she reminds him of the old saw—

The man that will nocht when he may,
Sall hauf nocht quhen he wald;

and to a second despairing plea of the soft dry night, the warm balmy air, the secret greenwood, replies—

Robin, that world is all awa,
And quite brocht to an end—

and goes home no longer merely technically "merry," but blithe enough "among the holtis hoar," with (as we may supplement the description) chin no doubt slightly upturned in the moonlight, leaving the luckless fool "in dolour and in care."

The remaining members of this small but admirable collection of verse are less interesting, though much above the standard of their time. The *Garmond* (Garment) *of Good Ladies* has been much praised, but its allegory—"Her hat should be of fair-having"; "Her sleeves should be of esperance"—too frequently takes an excursion beyond the agreeably quaint into the tediously grotesque. The *Bludy Serk*—the shirt of a knight who was desperately wounded in rescuing a lady from a giant, worn by her after his death—is better, but it is not improved by the inevitable *moralitas* (spared us in *Robene and Makyne*), likening the lady to man's soul, the giant to Lucifer, and the knight to Christ. The *Abbey Walk* is interesting for its opening couplet— Minor poems.

Alone as I went up and down
In ane Abbaye was fair to see—

and its possible association with the actual Dunfermline; while it morals on the refrain—

Obey and thank thy God of all—

with a right musical and pleasant piety. The rest, except a rather coarse and not very clever gibe at *Some Practice of Medicine*, are mostly religious-philosophical, and the best of them is the *Three Dead Pows*, *i.e.* death's-heads, which address man, warning him of his end. This is also given to Patrick Johnston.

It is usual to rank William Dunbar as the chief of all this group, and in fact the greatest Scottish poet except Burns. Nor is there much reason for quarrelling with the estimate, since Dunbar, though he has perhaps nothing equal in their own kinds to the above-noted passages of the *Testament of Creseide* and to *Robene and Makyne*, has a larger collection to show, both of good Dunbar.

and of excellent work, a somewhat wider range, and above all, a certain body and fulness of poetical wine which is not so evident in the pensive though not uncheerful schoolmaster of Dunfermline. We know a little, if not very much, more about Dunbar than about Henryson. He was certainly a Lothian man, probably allied not merely in name to the great family of the Earls of Dunbar and March, founded in the eleventh century by Cospatrick, and now chiefly subsisting in its northern or Morayshire branches. The year 1460, with the usual *circa*, is accepted as his birth-date. He went to St. Salvator's College, then the only one in the University of St. Andrews, took his B.A. in 1477, and his M.A. two years later, being, it seems, destined for the Church. He appears, both from his own account and that of others, to have been for a time a Franciscan friar, preaching and begging all over England and in France as well as in Scotland. But in the French phrase he "threw the frock to the nettles," and appears to have been employed by James IV. on diplomatic duty not merely in England, but in almost all parts of the Continent. One of his best and best-known poems welcomes Margaret of England on her coming to Scotland as the King's bride in 1503—he was specially attached to her service; and in 1508 he had some of his principal poems printed and published by the first Scottish printers, Chepman and Millar. Records of gifts and pensions to him exist up to June 1513, and then we hear no more of him. Flodden came in September of that year, and it has been thought that he too may have fallen in the "dark impenetrable ring" round his master. He was certainly dead in 1530, for Sir David Lyndsay says so; but this is all we know.

The poems known to be by, or reasonably attributed to, him are tolerably numerous, but not very bulky, none exceeding some 600 lines, while most are quite short. The entire number in Dr. Small's edition[1] is 101, of which eleven are given as "attributed," while seven, having been, as noted above, printed in the poet's own lifetime as his, have a higher degree of certainty than any of the others in text. The two most considerable are *The Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo* and the *Friars of Berwick*, the latter only "attributed," but displaying a *verve* and an accomplishment of form not known to be possessed by any other Scottish poet of the time. Both are very strongly Chaucerian, and the *Friars* is in Chaucerian "riding-rhyme"; the other piece is perhaps the most accomplished specimen of that revived alliteration which has been previously discussed. Dunbar does not limit himself to three alliterations, often giving four or even five, and he is somewhat less distinct in his middle pause than Langland. On the other hand,

The Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo.

[1] For the Scottish Text Society; also editions by D. Laing and by Dr. Schipper.

his whole verse, which averages thirteen or fourteen syllables, has a distinctness and evenness of rhythm which are only found in parts of *Piers Plowman*. The matter of the poem is an ultra-Chaucerian satire on women. The three personages are represented as all young and all pretty; they are drinking freely in a goodly garden on Midsummer Eve, and the poet achieves a triumphantly contrasted picture of physical beauty in scene and figure and of moral deformity in sentiment. The Wife of Bath, the undoubted model of these three young persons, is neither mealy-mouthed nor strait-laced, but she is always good-natured. Dunbar's wives and widow combine sensuality with ill-nature in a way not elsewhere to be paralleled in English literature till we come to the rakes of the Restoration. Yet the ugliness of the picture is half redeemed by the mastery with which Dunbar makes them expose their own shame, and sets their figures for us with a touch of grave irony worthy of Butler, and less purely caricatural in style than *Hudibras*. The *Friars of Berwick* is a version of a well-known *fabliau*, in which two friars, treated with scant hospitality by a woman who in her husband's absence has made an assignation with her lover, revenge themselves upon her (though not to extremity), taking advantage of the husband's unexpected return. It is therefore much less of an original and more of a commonplace than *The Twa Maryit Wemen*, but the story is told with the true *brio* of the *Canterbury Tales* themselves.

Next to these two may be ranked the *Golden Targe*, the *Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy*, the famous *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, and *The Thistle and the Rose*. The first of these is a typical fifteenth-century poem, allegorical in tone and very "rhetorical" in language, with the usual praise of Chaucer, "Rose of rhetors all," and "light of our Inglis," as well as of the "sugared lips and aureate tongues" of Gower and Lydgate. The *Targe* is in nine-lined stanzas; *The Thistle and the Rose*, in rhyme-royal, is of the same stamp and style, but adjusted to convey a welcome full of grace, good sense, and good taste to the youthful Margaret, the "rose" married to the "thistle." Many who know nothing else of Dunbar's, know the *Seven Deadly Sins* from its early inclusion in anthologies. The vigour of its lurid pictures has not been exaggerated, nor the real command of metre (Romance eights and sixes) which the poet here as everywhere displays, and which contrasts so strikingly with the staggering gait and palsied grip of his English contemporaries. The *Flyting*, one of a group of such things, is a curiosity no doubt, but a curiosity of a kind which could perhaps be spared. Literary Scots at all times, up to the eighteenth century, admitted, as has been said, a coarseness of actual language which is rarely paralleled in literary English; and these "flytings" consisted of

Other large poems.

alternate torrents of sheer Billingsgate poured upon each other by the combatants. There is not much doubt that many of the strange terms of abuse used are mere gibberish, coined for the occasion, but there was considerable legitimate accommodation in Scots for the purpose, and the poem, like others of its kind, is at worst a quarry for lexicographers.

Of the very numerous minor poems must be mentioned the touching and interesting *Lament for the Makers*, "when he was sick," with its passing-bell refrain of *Timor Mortis conturbat me*, and its list of poets, most of whom are shadows of shades; the lively if irreverent *Ballad of Kind Kyttok*, and her reception at Heaven's gates; the *Testament of Mr. Andro Kennedy*, a macaronic pendant to the *Flyting;* two rhetorical pieces on the Lord Bernard Stewart, living and dead; a sharp satirical description of Edinburgh Session; a quaint contrast of merry Edinburgh and distressful Stirling; the very vivid if not very decorous *Dance in the Queen's Chamber*, which, with other poems to the Queen, shows that Margaret had the full Tudor tolerance of broad speech; the not unamusing *Poem to ane Blackamoor*—"My lady with the meikle lips"—a negress who, as a rarity, had been imported to be maid to the Queen. The rest are pious or profane, personal or general, rhetorical or direct. But they are nearly always out of the common way of literature of their time; and the contemptuous fashion in which they have been sometimes spoken of is not a little surprising.

The last of the four poets to be mentioned here is also the least, though he has an interest of his own. Gavin or Gawain Douglas was the third son of Archibald Douglas—"Bell-the-Cat"—fifth Earl of Angus, and of Elizabeth Boyd. It is not known at which of the numerous seats of the Douglasses he was born; but the date must have been somewhere about the juncture of the years 1474-75. He matriculated at St. Andrews in 1489, was a "determinant" (= Bachelor Elect) in 1492, a Licentiate or incipient Master two years later. He took orders, and at once obtained various preferments, the chief being the benefice of Prestonkirk or Linton in East Lothian; while in 1501 he was made Dean or Provost of St. Giles's, Edinburgh. In this same year he finished the *Palice of Honour*. Between this and the year of Flodden, 1513, in the summer of which he finished his *Virgil*, we hear little of him. As readers of Scottish history know, his two elder brothers fell in the battle itself, which broke the heart, though it did not actually see the death, of Bell-the-Cat his father; while his nephew, son of the Master of Angus, killed at Flodden, very speedily gained the heart of Queen Margaret, who, though a widow and a mother, was not much more than a girl in age. By this marriage Gawain not merely

Gawain Douglas.

became in the future, through the Countess of Lennox and Darnley, a collateral ancestor of the whole royal house of Great Britain and Ireland, but was brought into very immediate connection with the chief person in the state, the Queen Regent, who at once gave him the rich Abbey of Aberbrothock or Arbroath, and shortly afterwards the brevet-keepership, as we may say, of the Great Seal. But Margaret's hasty marriage to the head of a powerful but dreaded house was extremely unpopular, and Gawain Douglas reaped from it more trouble than profit. He was never confirmed in Arbroath by the Pope; an attempt of his niece by marriage to make him Archbishop of St. Andrews, and therefore Primate of Scotland, was frustrated by the address and interest at Rome of another candidate; and though Douglas, in 1515, obtained the Bishopric of Dunkeld, this appointment also brought him endless trouble, and he was actually imprisoned by the new regent Albany for an offence apparently somewhat analogous to the English Præmunire, in obtaining the Pope's letters without the King's, *i.e.* the Regent's, license. The Pope, however, resented this very decidedly, and as Albany's severities towards Queen Margaret were also attracting the displeasure of her brother Henry VIII., Douglas was liberated, and after some further difficulty was consecrated to Dunkeld. He did not, however, enjoy it very peaceably—peaceable enjoyment of anything was hardly possible then in Scotland—and his death in London, where he was negotiating against Albany, coincided with hostile measures against him taken by Archbishop James Beaton, and removed him from evil to come. He died at the house of his friend Lord Dacre, and was buried in the Savoy. We have his will and a considerable number of public documents about him.

His life.

Douglas was not an old man—forty-eight only—when he died; and for the last ten years of his life he had been incessantly engaged in public and private business. But his work in literature—no doubt all composed in the quiet time between his ordination and Flodden—is not inconsiderable. Besides what we have, we know that he translated some Ovid, and it is possible that he did other things. His existing work[1] consists of the *Palice of Honour*, *King Hart*, and the version of the *Aeneid*. Critics of weight[2] have held up Douglas, on the strength of this *Virgil*, as representing, or at any rate anticipating, the new movement in poetry, that which incorporates the classical and modern tradition, and so as occupying a position at least historically more important than that of his more intensely and poetically gifted contemporary Dunbar. With all due deference, this

[1] Ed. Small, 4 vols. Edinburgh, 1874.

[2] See W. J. Courthope, *History of English Poetry*, i. 374, one of the few passages in this excellent book with which I cannot agree.

may well be deemed a mistake. Even in the selection of Ovid and Virgil, Douglas, though he may have been slightly further affected by the classical influence "in the air," did not go very much further than Chaucer a century and more before him. And in the manner of his work, both original and translated, he is not modern at all. He is with Hawes, even with Lydgate; not with Wyatt and Surrey.

In order to come to a just estimate of this, though the *Virgil* itself will give us sufficient data, it is before all things necessary to consider his original poems, the *Palice* and *King Hart*. Douglas, like his other countrymen just mentioned, is a better manager of "our Inglis" (it is believed that he himself first uses "Scots" with the national differentia) than Hawes; but the *Palice of Honour* and *King Hart* are in scheme and tone absolutely on a par with the *Pastime* and the *Example*. No later Renaissance sunrise-colour is on them: they are lighted only by the setting moon of the *Rose*. Indeed, neither in Hawes nor in Lydgate, neither in Occleve nor in the stiffer work of Dunbar, is there a more essentially fifteenth-century poem than the *Palice of Honour*. It has a prologue and parts; it is written in "aureate" language of at least eighteen-carat "rhetorical" value; it has entire stanzas (nine-lined ones rhymed *aabaabbab*) consisting of mere catalogues of names. The May morning, the stock, though no doubt quite sincere, classing of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, with an interesting note of "Dunbar yet ondeid," the vision, the heathen mythology and the historical characters, the bare, childlike allegory everywhere intruding itself, are unmistakable. Nobody who knows the *Romance of the Rose*, as Guillaume de Lorris started it nearly three hundred years before Douglas's death, can possibly mistake the quality. As usual in these poems, the story, apart from the allegory, is slender. The poet offends Venus (whose lusty countenance and "topaz" hair have been thought to be a compliment to the youthful Margaret), and is sentenced to a palinode and a journey round the world in company with the Muses. They at last reach the slippery Rock of Honour with its Palace at the top, are introduced to much historical and allegorical company, and the poem ends abruptly by one of the common devices for waking. The common form for this is relieved not merely by the singularly abundant vocabulary which distinguishes all these Scottish poets, but by a distinctly poetical imagination and no small descriptive power.

His original poems.

King Hart, the date of which is unknown, is duller. The hero is simply the Heart of man; and the poem is one of the innumerable allegories of Life. He has five servants—the senses; is captured by Dame Pleasance, liberated by Pity, captures Pleasance in turn and marries her, is visited by Age, deserted by his wife, etc., and at last

mortally wounded by Decrepitude. It is impossible to understand Mr. Small's assertion that this is "a work which in its execution is quite original." The stanza is the Chaucerian octave.

Undoubtedly, however, if Douglas had left nothing but his two ostensibly original poems, he would not stand nearly as high in historical repute as he does stand. It has been said that the idea of him as a strictly Renaissance writer, because he translates Virgil, is a mistake. Douglas, it is true, was no bad scholar; he certainly knew Latin well, and he may have known Greek. But Virgil comes out of his hands as he might have come out of those of Chaucer, almost as he might have come out of those of Benoît, with the sole exception that Douglas is faithfuller. He does not embroider on his text. But his version of that text looks backward and not forward. He accents classical names with an entire indifference to quantity. His vocabulary and phraseology are Romantic, not Classical. He substitutes the irregular charm of the Middle Ages for the exact, the impeccable, though the somewhat frigid, correctness of Virgil. Nor is this all. The fifteenth century, as we have seen, particularly affected prologues, and Douglas has given us a Prologue to each of the books of the *Aeneid*, as well as to the thirteenth *Aeneid* of Mapheus Vegius, which he also translated. His *Aeneid*.

And these prologues are, as indeed might be expected, by far the most interesting part of the work. The text is translated into riding-rhyme of very fair Chaucerian quality, and displaying Douglas's usual correctness of ear and his justness and colour of language. But in the Prologues he gives himself, as was natural and permissible, a much freer field. Their interest is not to be judged from the First, which is itself in couplets, and after a very "aureate" laudation of Virgil as "Chosen carbunkil"—

> Lanterne, lodesterne, mirror, and *a per se*—

engages in a severe criticism, not very graceful in tone and most awkwardly clothed in verse, of Caxton's *Aeneidos*. This extends to several hundred lines. The Second is very short—three stanzas of rhyme-royal—and not very notable; nor need much be said of the Third—five stanzas of nine lines each. It is not till the Fourth that the poet allows himself really to expatiate; but he does so here, with good effect, in nearly forty "royal" stanzas on the strength of Love, the incommodity and remedy of the same—it has been observed that he translated the *Remedium amoris*, though it is lost. The very first stanza hits successfully that clangorous note of the rhyme-royal which has been observed upon, and this note is well sustained throughout. The Fifth, short, nine-lined, and with another fling at Caxton, is less notable; and the Sixth (octaves) is chiefly noteworthy for its matter,

a curious discussion of various poetical and philosophical accounts of Hell. But the Seventh and Eighth are each, in its different way, of very high interest indeed. The Seventh, in couplets, contains a vigorous description of Winter attractive in itself and as an instance of that copious and vigorous vocabulary which all these poets show, and curious to contrast with Thomson. The Eighth has a curiosity still higher; for here Douglas indulges in that very quaint combination of alliterative and metrical prosody which was still sometimes attempted at this time, and has achieved, perhaps, the most remarkable example of it. The stanza somewhat resembles that of *Gawain and the Green Knight*, but is regularly arranged in a form of thirteen lines bobbed and wheeled. The first nine are heavily alliterated, differing from those of *The Twa Maryit Wemen* by having strong not weak endings, and rhymed *ababababc;* then comes a triplet, rhymed, of three iambics with equivalence, and then a final line *c* of four syllables only. The vocabulary of the piece is, outside the "Flytings," the most crabbed and fantastic even of these Scottish poems, and not a few of the words can merely be guessed at. The tenor of the whole is satirical on the state of the world.

The Ninth, beginning in six-lined stanzas, but soon passing into couplets, is still ethical in tone; and the Tenth (in five-lined stanzas) theological; while the Eleventh deals with chivalry, both sacred and profane. The Twelfth, "ane singular lerned prolog" of the description of May, again ranks among the best, and is in couplets;[1] and there is a similar one on June for the egregious Vegius his work.

It is, let it be repeated, much more on these Prologues (where he has evidently set his mind upon giving specimens of his powers in various matters and forms) than on his two long pieces that the estimate of Gawain Douglas should be based. That estimate cannot be of the highest, for the poet has too little detachment from the mere literary forms and fashions of his time, and is far too much under the prevalent delusion of the identity of "rhetorike" and poetry. But it should be relatively and by allowance high. He has in a very eminent degree that feeling for nature by which the poets of his country have ever since been honourably distinguished; he has a very good mastery of metrical form, and he perhaps shows the good side (it must be allowed that he also shows the bad) of the "aureate" or *rhétoriqueur* language better than any poet, either in English or in French, of his time and school.

[1] Here is a fine passage:—

> For to behald it was a gloir to see,
> The stabylit windis and the calmit sea,
> The soft seisoun, the firmament serene,
> The lowne illumynat air and fyrth amene.

CHAPTER IV

LATER ROMANCES IN PROSE AND VERSE

Sir Generydes, etc.—*Sir Launfal*—The verse *Morte Arthur*—*Golagros and Gawane* and *Rauf Coilyear*—Malory—Lord Berners—Caxton's translated romances.

THE difficulty in distinguishing the romances[1] of the fifteenth century from those of the fourteenth has been already referred to. With rare exceptions, it is doubtful whether we possess anything, originally of the fifteenth, in verse which is really of great merit. *Bevis of Hampton*, *Guy of Warwick*, the Charlemagne stories, and the rest continued to be copied or rehandled; and though it pleased Chaucer to make fun of the style, this does not seem to have had much effect on its popularity. In particular, the Arthurian legend, which, except in the Northern or Gawain division, appears not to have attracted very much attention in the fourteenth century, recovered, to our eternal advantage, much of its popularity in the fifteenth. The non-Arthurian romances, verse and prose, of the time are but of small interest. A fair example of them is *Sir Generydes*, which must almost to a certainty have been originally French, but of which no French original is known, while two different English versions—one in octosyllabic couplets, printed by Dr. Furnivall for the Roxburghe Club, and one in rhyme-royal, printed by Mr. Aldis Wright for the E.E.T.S.—are in existence. *Sir Generydes*[2] is a fair example of the common form of the romance of chivalry, but has little more (though certainly no less) individuality than the average nineteenth-century novel. *Torrent of Portugal*,[3] a shorter story of the same class, is in *Sir Thopas* metre; *Octovian*, a wicked mother-in-law story, mentioned before as possibly earlier, is, as printed by Weber (there is another version), in a slightly modified

Sir Generydes, etc.

[1] For the chief romance-collections, see notes, pp. 82 and 102.

[2] I use the E.E.T.S. edition.

[3] Ed. Halliwell, London, 1842. Re-edited for the E.E.T.S. by Dr. Adam.

form of that stanza, rhymed *aaabab*, with the *b* lines shortened, instead of the usual *aa* long, *b* short, *cc* long, *b* short.

The best romances in verse not strictly ballad-romance (see next chapter), and the worst, belong to the Arthurian division. At the head of the former we may put, despite its libel on Queen Guinevere, the beautiful poem of *Sir Launfal*,[1] adapted and much improved by Thomas Chester, who probably lived in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, from a poem of Marie de France, centuries older and not improbably metamorphosed before it came into Chester's hands. The discredit of making the Queen play the part of Potiphar's wife, of which there is no trace in the better Arthurian legends, is not his. But the actual story of Launfal, with his fairy love, his unfortunate divulging of their passion, his punishment and his pardon, is one of the most exquisite of all mediæval tales, and is quite charmingly told by Chester in the *Sir Thopas* metre doubled. The beauty of which this stanza is capable, especially in the doubled form, where the rhymes run *aabccbddbeeb*, each *b* line being short, is nowhere better shown, nor its complete freedom at its best from the ding-dong, sing-song monotony which beyond all doubt it often puts on, and which Chaucer has so wickedly immortalised.

Sir Launfal.

Not far below *Launfal* in poetical merit, and of the first interest as having almost demonstrably served as direct original to Malory (*vide infra*), is the *Morte Arthur*, which Dr. Furnivall printed more than forty years ago,[2] a piece of some 4000 lines, arranged in quatrains rhymed *abab*, which not uncommonly spread into sixains or octaves of the same arrangements.

The verse *Morte Arthur.*

Lancelot of the Laik,[3] a poem in heroic couplets, and in Scots or some other extremely northern dialect of English, is ascribed to the end of the fifteenth century, and if so, is the latest Arthurian poem of the genuine kind (before the legend began to be merely "translated," as we find it in Spenser) that we possess.

Meanwhile one of the most conscientious, but of the very dullest, of the vast army of dull versifiers of the time had busied himself with the great matter which, perhaps at the same time, was taking in a sense almost final form in prose at the hands of a very different person. "Herry" (Henry) Lonelich, skinner, a subject of King Henry the Sixth, was evidently as pious as his namesake and master, and in his different vocation as ineffective. His *Merlin* is not yet accessible in print, save for an extract of Dr. Kölbing's.[4] His *Holy Grail* has been twice printed by Dr. Furnivall,[5] and is one of the

[1] Printed in Ritson's first volume.
[2] London and Cambridge, 1864.
[3] Ed. Skeat, E.E.T.S.
[4] In his edition of *Arthour and Merlin*.
[5] For the Roxburghe Club and the E.E.T.S. Some prefer "Lovelich."

most curious books in existence, the wonderful interest and charm of the matter, which might have been thought likely either to stir a translator into genius or compel him to silent despair, being approached with a cheerful doggedness of incompetency difficult, if not impossible, to parallel elsewhere. Hardly any other story could possibly survive such a translator ; no other translator, one would hope, could have failed to catch fire from such a story. But except from his matter, which flames like the infant Havelok in the rude hands of Grim, there is no spark of illumination in Lonelich, who thumps out his couplets by the help of "sikerly" and "everidel," of "verament" and "echone," in a manner well-nigh intolerable.

Golagros and Gawane and *Rauf Coilyear*.

In the way of alliterative romance we have to put to the credit of the century in all probability, or rather certainly, two very interesting poems in Scots, *Golagros and Gawane* and *Rauf Coilyear*.[1] For neither of these have we MS. authority, though we know that both did exist in the Asloan MS. ; and our printed *Rauf Coilyear* is as late as 1572. But we have an allusion to this same poem by Gawain Douglas as early as 1503, and *Golagros and Gawane* was published by Chepman and Millar among the incunabula of the Scottish press in 1508. Both are in the thirteen-line alliterated and rhymed stanza with wheel (*v. supra*, p. 192). *Golagros and Gawane* belongs evidently to the Cumbrian branch of the Arthurian legend, and presents some very close resemblances to the latter part of the *Awntyrs of Arthur*. *Rauf Coilyear*, on the other hand, belongs to the other great family, and, so far as we know, is the only original Charlemagne poem in English. It is one of the numerous and generally interesting family of the "King and the Tanner" class, the king's unknowing associate here being a "collier" (*i.e.* charcoal-burner), and the king, as has been said, no less a person than Charlemagne. It is a very spirited poem. Nobody has succeeded in identifying the author of either this or *Golagros ;* but it is not at all impossible that both may have one poet, and most probable that he lived at the end of our century, and was one of Dunbar's "makers." If so, he was by no means the worst of them, and not very far from the best, except Henryson and Dunbar himself.

Practically nothing is known of the author of the greatest of all English romances, prose or verse —of one of the greatest romances of the world—a book which, though in mere material a compilation, and

[1] *Golagros and Gawane* has been reprinted by Pinkerton in *Scottish Poems*, 1792 ; by Laing (a great rarity) in 1827 ; by Madden, with other Gawaine pieces, in 1839 ; and by Mr. Amours in *Scottish Alliterative Poems*, cited above. There is also a German reprint. *Rauf Coilyear* can be found in Mr. Amours's volume, in one of the volumes of the E.E.T.S. *Charlemagne Romances*, and also in Laing's several times reprinted *Ancient and Popular Poetry of Scotland* (last edited by Small, Edinburgh, 1885).

sometimes cleaving rather closely to its multifarious texts, is, despite the occasional misjudgment of unhappy criticism, a great and original book. Caxton, the printer (*vide infra*, chap. vi.)—who, instead of, like most early printers, giving us early editions, and mostly bad ones, of the classics, which were quite safe, gave us, to the infinite advantage of England, early models of composition in English, and preserved to us, in this instance at least, an English text which might but for him have perished—tells us that the *Morte d'Arthur* was translated in the ninth year of King Edward IV. (that is to say, in 1470, fifteen years before he himself published it) by Sir Thomas Malory, Knight. Caxton's follower, Wynkyn de Worde, in the second edition of 1496, makes the name "Maleore." Malory or Mallory is both a Yorkshire and a Leicestershire name, but there are absolutely no materials for identifying Sir Thomas; the later suggestions that he was a Welsh priest, not an English knight, are baseless guesses, and we do not know in the very least why, when, or where he executed his book. What we do know, from the verse *Morte* and from Lonelich, is that a strong revived interest in the Arthurian Legend came in about the middle of the century, and this is to all appearances one of the fruits of it.[1]

Malory.

If so, it is incomparably the most precious. It is probable that, though among the laborious and respectable, but rather superfluous, inquiries into origins, none has yet been discovered for the "Beaumains" story and for a few other things, Malory "did not invent much." The fifteenth century was not an inventive time, and there was much better work for it to do than second-rate invention. Then and then only could the mediæval spirit, which was not quite dead, have been caught up and rendered for us with a still present familiarity, with the unconscious but unmistakable touch of magic which approaching loss reflects, and in English prose, which, unlike English verse, still had the bloom on it—the soon-fading *beauté du diable* of youth and freshness.

Criticisms have been made on Malory's manner of selecting and arranging his materials — criticisms which, like all unsuccessful exercises of the most difficult of arts, come from putting the wrong questions to the jury—from asking, "Has this man done what *I* wanted him to do?" or "Has he done it as *I* should have done it?" instead of "Has he done what *he* meant to do?" and "Has he done this well?" Malory might perhaps, though in his time it would have been difficult to get all the texts together, have given an intelligent *précis* of the whole Arthurian Legend, instead of which he selected his materials rather arbitrarily, and indulged in what looks to some

[1] The book, frequently printed up to the seventeenth century, has also been repeatedly reprinted since the beginning of the nineteenth.

critics like incomprehensible divagation, and not much more comprehensible suppression. He might have arranged a regular epic treatment of his subject, instead of which it is often difficult to say who is the hero, and never very easy to say what special contribution to the plot the occasionally inordinate episodes are making. What he did do consists mainly in two things, or perhaps three. He selected the most interesting things with an almost invariable sureness, though there are one or two omissions; and he omitted the less interesting parts with a sureness to which there are hardly any exceptions at all. He grasped, and this is his great and saving merit as an author, the one central fact of the story—that in the combination of the Quest of the Graal with the loves of Lancelot and Guinevere lay the kernel at once and the conclusion of the whole matter. And last (his great and saving merit as a writer) he told his tale in a manner which is very nearly impeccable

There is one practically infallible test by which all but the dullest and most incompetent can be convinced of Sir Thomas's skill in this last direction, the comparison of his narrative of the last scenes of all with that in the verse *Morte Arthur* above mentioned, which was in all probability his direct original, and which was certainly written just before his day. Take the death of Arthur itself, or the final interview of Lancelot and the Queen, in both; compare them, and then remember that Malory has been dismissed as "a mere compiler." It is possible that his art is mostly unconscious art—it is not much the worse for that. But it is nearly as infallible as it is either unconscious or thoroughly concealed. The pictorial power, the musical cadence of the phrase, the steady glow of chivalrous feeling throughout, the noble morality (for the condemnation of Ascham and others is partly mere Renaissance priggishness stupidly condemning things mediæval offhand, and partly Puritan prudery throwing its baleful shadow before), the kindliness, the sense of honour, the melancholy and yet never either gloomy or puling sense of the inevitable end—all these are eminent in it. It has been said, with perhaps hardly too great whimsicality, that there is only one bad thing about Malory—that to those who read him first he makes all other romances of Chivalry disappointing. But the fancy may at any rate be fairly retorted, for if any one is so unfortunate as to find other romances of chivalry disappointing, there is Malory to fall back upon. Merely in English prose he is a great figure, for although his medium would not be suitable for every purpose, it is nearly perfect for his own. Merely as the one great central storehouse of a famous and fertile story his place is sure. But apart from all these extrinsic considerations, it is surer still in the fact that he has added to literature an imperishable book.

The second great writer or translator of Romance in prose during this period, John Bourchier, Lord Berners, was born, a little before the probable date of the writing of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, in 1467, and was the son of Humphrey Lord Berners, who fell on the Yorkist side at the battle of Barnet. He may have been a Balliol man; he certainly saw much both of war and diplomacy in the later years of Henry VII. and the earlier of his son; he was Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1516, and from 1520 onwards Governor of Calais. It would seem that his literary work all dates from this last period of his life, which closed in 1533. His *Froissart* began to appear in 1523, and he also translated (though the books did not in some cases appear till after his death) the great romance of *Huon of Bordeaux*, that of *Arthur of Little Britain*, later in date and lower in kind, Guevara's *Dial for Princes*, a book which has been thought, not without some reason, to have had much influence on the development of Euphuism, and another Spanish allegoric-chivalrous romance, the *Castle* (originally *Prison*) *of Love*.[1] In his work from the Spanish he appears to have used not the originals but French versions.

Lord Berners.

In a late stage of writing, prose, and indeed verse, translations have very little interest, and are merely or mainly makeshifts for the use of those who cannot read the originals. In the early stages, especially of prose writing, their value is very different, and this constitutes the attractions of our fifteenth and early sixteenth century prose, borrowed as it almost always is in matter. And Lord Berners ranks with Malory as its most gifted practitioner. His *Froissart* gives him the greatest opportunity, and he has availed himself of that opportunity to the utmost. His style would not, of course, be suitable for every purpose or even for many purposes, but in his combination of rhetorical and "aureate" language with simpler forms, in his faint retention of poetic diction with a perfect adjustment to those needs of prose fiction or of romantic history which are nearer to those of poetry than is the case with any other division of prose, he is certainly unsurpassed, and it may be doubted whether he has been equalled, though Mr. William Morris sometimes ran him hard. The *Huon*, representing a late French rehandling of one of the most romantic of the *chansons de geste*, has

[1] Not to be confounded with the very much earlier book of the same name translated from Bishop Grostête's French a little before or a little after 1300, and edited by Dr. Weymouth for the Philological Society. This is religious, and of some linguistic, but very little literary, interest. As for Berners's own work, the *Froissart* was reprinted by Utterson in 1812, with some reduction and modernisation by Prof. Macaulay for the "Globe" Series, 1895, and completely by Prof. Ker in the "Tudor Translations." *Huon* has been edited by Mr. S. L. Lee for the E.E.T.S. Utterson also reprinted *Arthur of Little Britain* (1814).

the fault, common to most such rehandlings, of long-windedness and surplusage; but still it gives Berners good opportunity, and he takes it admirably. The part which Mr. Lee has isolated in his second volume as "The Story of Esclaramonde" might very well be taken as an introduction to this kind of romance by novices, and they are to be pitied if they do not go on. Even *Arthur of Little Britain* well represents the beginning of the later and more extravagant romances, of which the *Amadis* group are the best known: and Spenser almost certainly knew and used it.

Between the *Morte* and the *Froissart* Caxton and his successors had made very large additions to the stock of romance in English. The *Histories of Troy*, more than ten years before the printing of Malory, *Reynard the Fox*, the *Golden Legend*, *Paris and Vienne*, the *Life of Charles the Great*, the *Four Sons of Aymon*, *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, *Godfrey of Bulloigne*, the *Aeneidos*, which so did vex Gawain Douglas—being Caxton's own contribution, a very considerable one, as most of them were translated as well as printed by himself. We shall speak of Caxton's prose style later: here we are chiefly concerned with the romance substance of his work. There is little doubt that these late romances, especially the prose ones, had an immense effect on the first generation or two of readers of printed books, while perhaps their diffusion in print, as well as the fact that the versions selected for reproduction or translation were nearly always late and very seldom of the best, may have also contributed to that strange disgust with them which is not entirely to be accounted for by the mere pedantry, innocently consequent on the revived study of the classics directly, or by the touch of religious and Puritan dislike of romance, which soon supervened. At the same time, this crop of romances, and the attention paid to it, had also beyond all question much to do with the heroic enthusiasm of Elizabethan days, and with that after-glow of chivalry itself of which the noblest and most undying monument is the *Faërie Queene*.[1]

Caxton's translated romances.

[1] Although as much room as possible has been given to the romances, far more would be required to do them real justice. Indeed, the division branches off into almost infinite sub-varieties—for instance, the curious series of *Visions* of Hell and Purgatory, of which the *Visions of Tundale* (fifteenth century), ed. Turnbull (Edinburgh, 1843) is a good example. The minor *Prose* romances are, as a rule, of much less interest, as may be seen from the standard collection of them by W. J. Thoms, 2nd ed. 3 vols. London, 1858. To the *Verse* may be added the English *Partonope of Blois* (Roxburghe Club, 1862), which may date from *c.* 1430, and is a fair version, in loose octosyllables, of its beautiful story; the Scots *Clariodus* (Maitland Club, 1830), in very wooden heroics, which is possibly fifteenth century; and the curious *Buik of Alexander the Great*, in Scots octosyllables, printed in 1580 and reprinted by the Bannatyne Club in 1831.

CHAPTER V

MINOR POETRY AND BALLADS

Date of Ballads—The *Nut-browne Mayde*—"I sing of a maiden"—The Percy Folio—*Graysteel*

BAD as the reputation of the fifteenth century is for poetry in England (and indeed in most countries except Italy), it will have been seen that there are notable individual exceptions. And a still better face is put upon the matter when we come to what is called minor poetry, and especially to Ballads.

In a history, and especially a short history, of this subject dissertations on purely speculative points are out of place, and perhaps in no case is this more so than in regard to the origins of Ballad literature generally and the date of English Ballad literature in particular. There may be said to be here, as generally, three main opinions, or groups of shaded opinion: the first assigning a remote, and if possible even contemporary, origin to ballads that have any pretence of history, and as ancient a one as possible to those which are purely romantic; the second postponing the date to comparatively, or in some cases quite, modern times; and the third, which endeavours to assign not merely a general middle term but a particular age in which the literary sentiment, as yet not absorbed by a literary class, existed fluidly and at large, and found its special bent in ballad-making. It may be observed in passing that the second, while disagreeable to sentiment, is also quite contrary to probability, and has scarcely any direct evidence to support it. Between the first and third, opinion rather than demonstration must decide, but it is not impertinent to remark that besides the opposition on their surface, a very important order of difference is involved, which may be indicated by the question, "Are romances and early epics conglomerates of ballad, or are ballads disintegrations of epics —romance-episodes worked up into ballad form?"

Date of Ballads.

To the present writer the balance of probability, for reasons too numerous and intricate to be more than partially and generally stated

here, seems to incline to the supposition that the fifteenth century was the special time of ballad-production in England; while not probability merely, but something like direct evidence, shows that during this time and the early sixteenth the romances, while they were lengthened in prose, underwent a pretty general process of shortening and modifying in verse. Among the facts pointing to these conclusions may be advanced the change during the fourteenth century from French and Latin to English as the vehicle of avowedly political poems dealing with the events of the day, and therefore dated; the famous ballad of *Chevy Chase*, the oldest of its class, if not of all our ballads, which in its primitive form certainly dates within a decade or so of the battle of Otterburn itself; the general language and colour of the ballads, which is scarcely ever of a tone more archaic than that of 1400; and lastly, the testimony of the famous Percy Folio, the most important single collection of antique ballads that we have. It is known that, as far as actual writing goes, the folio is not older than the middle of the seventeenth century, and that some of the texts contained in it are not older than that date. But the majority are very much older, and yet pretty certainly not older than the fifteenth. In the balladised versions which this MS. contains of romances like *Sir Launfal*, *Sir Degarè*, and a dozen others, which are pretty certainly of fifteenth or early sixteenth century date, we get not merely interesting direct evidence of the process which the romances themselves were at this time undergoing, but inevitable collateral suggestions of the ballad influence, which beyond all reasonable doubt was creating as well as reshaping. Like the oldest of our ballads, the oldest of our carols also date from this time; and while in England proper formal poetry of substance is undoubtedly at a lower level than previously, regular as well as irregular lyric is at a distinctly higher. Except *Alison* and the best of its companions, there is indeed nothing so good in this division of English literature before the fifteenth century as the two best things of that century's own, while it has others not inferior.

These two best things, both anonymous, are the famous ballad of the *Nut-browne Mayde*, and the less famous, but not less exquisite carol of Our Lady, beginning "I sing of a maiden." For the first of these we have a much earlier authority than Percy, indeed, as is generally known, it was modernised by Prior long before the publication of the *Reliques*, and had actually been reprinted critically in a very remarkable work, the *Prolusions* of Capell, the Shakesperian scholar, in 1760. It appeared first in Arnold's *Chronicle*, a book published at Antwerp in 1502. It cannot be necessary to say very much about so well known a thing; yet it has as a rule been rather under- than over-praised.

The *Nut-browne Mayde*.

The ring and swing of the metre, of which no previous example seems to exist,[1] and which argues very considerable development of the language, the felicity of the alternate refrain, the singular skill with which the variation of equivalent feet, disyllabic and trisyllabic, is managed so as to prevent monotony, and the adaptation of the whole to the sentiment, imagery, and incident, are not less remarkable than the tenderness and sweetness, never in the least mawkish, of that sentiment itself, the dramatic management of the story, and the modest cogency of the moral. The piece is, as its own time would have said, a very "margarite" of English verse for that time, and indeed a pearl of poetry for ever.

"I sing of a maiden."

Nor is the shorter, simpler, and far less known carol[2] inferior in charm; indeed, in the quality properly called exquisiteness it is even superior. The best of the Caroline poets, our chief masters in this quality, would have been in danger of over-elaborating it, or of faintly "smirching" the ineffable grace of the lines—

He came also still
  Where his mother was,
As dew in April
  That falleth on the grass.

He came also still
  To his mother's bower,
As dew in April
  That falleth on the flower.

He came also still
  Where his mother lay,
As dew in April
  That falleth on the spray.

In no previous verse had this Aeolian music—this "harp of Ariel" that distinguishes English at its very best in this direction, alike from the fuller but less unearthly harmonies of Provençal, Italian, and Spanish, from the sharper sound of French, and from the less elfish though still fairy sound of German—been given to the world.

If nothing equals these things, others come near them. We may compare the older part of the Percy Folio both with some other English things and with some minor and anonymous Scottish poetry of the time. A complete detailed analysis, even in the most

[1] Unless it be the "E. I. O." doubtfully attributed to Hampole (No. vii. *Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse*, E. E. T. S. 1866).

[2] First printed by Wright for the Warton Club in 1855 (p. 30 of *A Collection of Carols*); reprinted by Mr. Bullen in his *Carols and Poems* (London, 1886).

compressed form, of the contents of the "Manuscript"[1] is impossible here; but some remarks on the most important groups, and a few individuals among those of its contents which certainly or probably date from the period with which we are now dealing, can hardly be without value. It contains, in the first place, a group of Robin Hood Ballads, which, of course, share in the general uncertainty pertaining to all notices of that celebrated person or eidolon. It is possible that some of these are in the oldest form as old as the fourteenth century; but probable that most of them date from our time. In the second place, we have a large group of broken-up, modernised, and, it must be added, for the most part vulgarised, Arthurian ballads or short romances:—*King Arthur and the King of Cornwal*, *Sir Lancelot of Dulake*, *The Turk and Gowin* (Gawaine), *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* (the famous tale of the Loathly Lady), *Sir Lambwell* (Launfal), *Merlin*, *Arthur's Death*, *The Green Knight*. Closely connected with these is a still larger group, in which the same process has been applied to miscellaneous romances of adventure, some of which we possess in longer forms and some of which stand alone in the shorter. Such are *Sir Cauline* (one of the finest), *Sir Degree* (Sir Degarè), *Sir Triamore*, *Sir Eglamour*, *Guy and Amarant*, *Guy and Colebrand*, *John the Reeve*, and others. Another and extremely important class consists of the Historical Ballads, of which, as it happens, very importantly, the great majority concern the fifteenth and early sixteenth century:—*The Siege of Rouen* (Henry V.'s), *The Murder of the Princes*, *The Rose of England*, *Bosworth Field*, *Lady Bessie*, *Sir Andrew Barton*, *Flodden Field*, *Scottish Field*, *Musselborough Field* (Pinkie), and others. Lastly, there are the more romantic ballads, such as the *Heir of Lynne*, the *Nut-browne Mayde* itself, and many more, which gave Percy's book, extracted from this folio, its main charm.

The Percy Folio.

An interesting and not unfairly representative specimen of the contents of this invaluable collection is the once extremely popular romance of *Sir Eger*, *Sir Grime* (Græme?), *and Sir Graysteel*, which, till the contents of the MS. were made public, had only been known from a printed and watered-down eighteenth-century version abstracted by Ellis. The piece is probably not very early—we hear nothing of it before the end of the fifteenth century—but it is most likely one, and a happy one, of those instances whereof several have been noted in the last chapter and in this, in which the fifteenth century gathered up and reshaped for the last time the best traits of the earlier romance. Winglaine, the Belle Dame Sans Merci; her opposite the Lady Loosepain (not

Graysteel.

[1] Ed. Hales and Furnivall, 3 vols. and supplement, London, 1867.

such a pretty name as Nepenthe, but not different in meaning), all graciousness and grace; the well-meaning but rather venturous than strong Sir Eger; his faithful friend Sir Grime; the mysterious Graysteel in his Forbidden Country—all these make an excellent tale told in some fifteen hundred couplet verses, with no great poetical accomplishment (indeed, most of the Folio texts are degraded by centuries of careless and tasteless copying), but by no means ill.

It is only by reading and re-reading (a very pleasing task) such books as this edition of the Percy Folio, as Laing's above-cited *Ancient and Popular Poetry of Scotland*, as Mr. W. C. Hazlitt's *Early Popular Poetry*, as the (also above cited) works of Utterson and Hartshorne, and as Mr. Wright's Collections of *Political Poetry* for the "Rolls Series," and his *Carols* for the Percy and Warton Societies,[1] that the general character and substance of fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century poetry can be properly appreciated. Even after these gleanings, pretty abundant but frequently duplicated, there is probably not a little still in MS.; yet what we have suffices. We see in it only occasional evidence of very distinct poetic gift, and still seldomer much command of accomplished poetic form; but we also see that vernacular verse was thoroughly established by this time, that there was a popular taste for it, if a rough, uncultivated, and easily satisfied one; and that it was being applied to all sorts of subjects in all sorts of spirits. In other words, the soil was being well stirred and the seeds were being plentifully and widely scattered. It did no harm that some time was to pass before anything more than a wilding harvest came.[2]

[1] See also J. A. Fuller-Maitland, *English Carols of the Fifteenth Century* (London, *n.d.*).

[2] The *Ballads*, after much piecemeal editing for a hundred years, have at last been put in a standard edition by the late Professor Child's monumental collection, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. in 10 parts, Boston (Mass.) and London, 1882-98. But I should be loath not to find room for citation of the first book which gives our early poetry of this kind with wide range and real scholarship, Ritson's *Ancient Songs and Ballads*, 1790, 3rd ed. [Hazlitt] 1877.

Note to Eighth Edition.—There is now a most valuable additional aid to the study in Messrs. Chambers and Sidgwick's *Early English Lyric* (London, 1907), a collection largely from MS. sources.

CHAPTER VI

MISCELLANEOUS PROSE

Importance of fifteenth-century prose—Pecock—His style and vocabulary—Fortescue, Capgrave, Fabyan—Caxton—Fisher—His advances in style—More—Latimer—Coverdale—Cranmer.

THE prose of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century—or, in other words, the prose from Fortescue to Fisher—supplies, with the almost sole exception of the work of Malory and Berners, which has been treated above, little or nothing that is delectable to the mere literary consumer. But to the student of literary history it is one of the most important periods of the whole subject. It is, in fact, the great exercising-ground—the great school-time—of English prose: the period in which the nearly unconscious experiments of Chaucer and Wyclif and Mandeville were expanded and multiplied, sometimes with an almost conscious purpose of developing prose style, and always with the practical effect of so doing, by writers in the most widely diverging branches of literature—history and law, political and ecclesiastical controversy, sermons, letters, philosophy of a sort.

Importance of fifteenth-century prose.

Reginald Pecock, Bishop of St. Asaph and Chichester, and author, among much other work, Latin and English, of the *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*,[1] is an interesting person from more points of view than one. His very life was dramatic enough, and moralled the favourite moral of the century—the effects of the Wheel of Fortune—with singular force. As is usual with men of his time, we know neither his birthplace nor his birth-date; but the former was probably Wales, and the latter pretty certainly the end of the fourteenth century. He went to Oxford and became Fellow of Oriel in 1417, soon afterwards taking orders. There was no dispute about his erudition. In 1431 he was made Master of Whittington College, London, and thirteen years later

Pecock.

[1] Ed. Babington, "Rolls Series," 2 vols. London, 1860.

appointed to the bishopric of St. Asaph. Up to this time, when we may suppose him to have been about fifty, all things had gone smoothly with him. But he was soon to experience the reverse of the wheel, which came about in a manner not entirely clear, and probably due as much to the violent party politics of the time as to his personal faults.[1] It is, moreover, evident that Pecock, both in sermons and in his works, adopted that most perilous of all courses, the attempt to justify orthodoxy and authority by paradoxical and irregular kinds of reasoning. He met the complaints against the bishops by preaching at St. Paul's Cross that bishops were not bound to preach; and the *Repressor* attacks Lollardy with arguments which his enemies either seriously thought, or affected for their own ends to think, as heretical as the views he combated. He had been befriended by the good Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, but after Gloucester's murder he seems to have made friends with Margaret and Suffolk, and obtained, in 1450, his translation to Chichester. Suffolk was extremely unpopular, but as Pecock was not arraigned for heresy for seven years to come, it seems excessive to connect his fall with the favourite. However, it was distinct enough when it came, whatever the cause. He was accused of treating authority disrespectfully in his works, as well as of heresy in setting up reason (though on the orthodox side) as the criterion of religious truth. He was condemned, had the choice of recantation or the secular arm, recanted abjectly, handing his books to the executioner to burn, resigned or was deprived of his bishopric, and probably spent the short remainder of his life in strict confinement at Thorney Abbey.

The extreme importance of Pecock's position in the history of English prose—a position which, from its original and representative character, will save us much repetition if it be dwelt on here—consists mainly in two points: the effect upon style which the purpose of his books enabled, or rather obliged, him to attempt and partly to produce, and his vocabulary. As regards the first point, it must be remembered that, though there may have been gross ignorance and intellectual sloth among the lower friars and monks, the educated and academic clergy of the fifteenth century were, with certain allowances, trained with much greater intellectual keenness and severity than any class of men at the present day; the much-sneered-at scholastic discipline providing and enforcing an intellectual *askesis* to which there is no modern parallel. But all this training went on in Latin, and the problem was how to conduct a dispute on the same lines in English. Wyclif had been

His style and vocabulary.

[1] He had, however, excited the most violent personal and religious antipathy. Gascoigne's *Liber Veritatum* (*vide supra*, p. 117) is permeated with a sort of refrain of execration of "Reginaldus Pecok, Wallicus origine, episcopus Assavensis."

an adept in scholastic argument, but when he had occasion to employ it he had mostly used Latin, and his English works were mainly, though not entirely, addressed to the vulgar. The lapse of more than half a century had made it not merely possible, but desirable to change the general *venue* from Latin to English; and to address clergy and laity at once. It is very probable that this divulgence helped to irritate Pecock's enemies against him: but that is beside our present point, which is, that having undertaken to conduct arguments of scholastic theology in the vernacular, he had to adapt that vernacular itself to the strictly accurate thought, and the precise terminology, required by scholastic habits. He did not entirely succeed, but he succeeded in a degree really surprising, and one which could not but enlarge the powers of English correspondingly. Beside the mere narrative of Mandeville and Trevisa, the popular scientific exposition of Chaucer's *Astrolabe*, and the popular invective (for it is often little more) of the average Wyclifian tract, there now took its place downright argument in English, the setting forth in vernacular dress of the long-proved technicalities and terminologies of the schools in a tongue understanded of the people.

The vocabulary which Pecock adopted or invented for this purpose has special interest. It is on the one side necessarily more technical than Chaucer's, and on the other hand it is deliberately more archaic and vernacular. In particular, we see in it abundant examples of a process of thoroughgoing "Teutonification" of Latin, Romance, and even Greek forms, which would have almost satisfied the champions of "ungothroughsomeness" for "impenetrability" in our own times. Pecock has "about writing" for "circumscription" of a coin; "aforebar" and "beforebar" for "prevent"; "alight" not in the modern sense, but = "alleviate"; "apropre" for "appropriate" (an instance of a general tendency of his to cut off Latin suffixes): "beholdable," an audacious Anglicising of "theoretic"; "closingly" for "inclusively"; "customable" for "habitual"; "endly" for "finally"; nay, he even retains the old English "undeadly" for "immortal." And that these and a vast number of other vernacularities were deliberate is shown by the fact that he has no horror of foreign terms as such, where he cannot get a vernacular form, though when he can find or make the latter he always prefers it. In fact, though this compound of forms that never took permanent place in the language, with archaisms on the one hand, and Latinisms on the other, makes Pecock's pages look very harsh and obscure, it is clear that his scheme was a possible one; that it actually did exercise English in form, and enrich it in matter to no small degree; and that, though the classical reaction of the Renaissance prevented much of his vocabulary from receiving final letters of naturalisation,

a good deal more than has actually been naturalised might have been admitted with no disadvantage.

No other of the early fifteenth-century prose writers—*i.e.* those born certainly or probably within the verge of the fourteenth, or but a little later—equals Pecock in original and representative character, or Malory in charm. But John Capgrave and Sir John Fortescue, at least, deserve to keep here their traditional places, if only because each admitted a new subject—law in the one case, original history in the other—to the liberty of English prose. Fortescue, whose not certain birth- and death-dates are usually given as 1394 and 1474, was a member of the famous western family of his name, an Oxford man, a lawyer, and in 1442 Chief Justice of the King's Bench. He was a Lancastrian throughout the war; but after Tewkesbury rallied to Edward IV., though he had to make a distinctly ignominious recantation in print. Of his very numerous works, some of which are in Latin, the most important in English is the rather well-known *Governance of England*, one passage of which, the famous contrast between the unruly independence of the Englishman and the slavish cowardice of France, is equally notable and characteristic. Capgrave, born in 1393 at Lynn, died in 1464. He was a monk, and wrote most voluminously in both languages. His *Chronicle of England* is his main title to admission here. No two styles could well be more different than his and Pecock's, the former being not indeed incorrect, but devoid of character, singularly free from archaic obscurity and archaic relish alike, suited fairly for plain business-like narration, but hardly for anything else; and on the whole more like Mandeville, with the zest and poetic quality taken out, but the short simply-linked sentences remaining, than like any other of his predecessors. Allowing for the advance of some fifty years, the style of the next historian of note, Robert Fabyan, who represents the second half of the century as the Prior of Lynn does the first, is not unlike Capgrave's.[1]

Fortescue, Capgrave, Fabyan.

The importance of Caxton in English prose was by no means merely ministerial, merely limited to the fact that he was the introducer of Malory's immortal book, and of a little other good matter to the English reading public, or that he was the first practitioner of the great art of printing among us. For very much of his extensive work was not merely printed, but written by himself; and though it is perfectly true that the matter was, save in an infinitesimal degree, translated, yet that in the circum-

Caxton.

[1] Fortescue's chief work has been edited by C. Plummer, 1885; his whole works by Lord Clermont. Capgrave's *Chronicle* is in the "Rolls Series," ed. Hingeston (1858); his long verse *St. Katharine* has been given by the E.E.T.S. The standard edition of Fabyan is Sir Henry Ellis's in 1811.

stances, as was pointed out before, does not diminish his claims. It was impossible for any one of intelligence to render Latin or French into English without exercising the youthful language in the airs, the graces, the crafts of its elder. There is no more interesting passage of its kind than that where Caxton, in the prologue to the *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*, tells us how "I, having no great charge of occupation, took a French book and read therein many strange and marvellous histories, wherein I had great pleasure and delight, as well for the novelty of the same as *for the fair language of French, which was in prose so well and compendiously set and written, that methought I understood the sentence and substance of every matter.*" One sees at once the sentiment and the aim not of Caxton merely, but of a dozen and a hundred known and unknown translators of French and Latin in these early days, seeing "the fair language of French," or the grave and stately language of Latin, reflecting how destitute English, at least in prose (for they had no doubt about their Chaucer, even if they did a little unadvisedly couple Gower and Lydgate with him), was of such fairness, such gravity, such stateliness, and determining, so far as in them lay, to give readers in the vernacular not merely the bare matter, but the matter with some art. Nor is Caxton himself to be by any means lightly spoken of for accomplishment in this respect. He tells us here and elsewhere of his difficulties in adjusting his broad and rude Kentish dialect (we know that Kent, near as it was to London, was up to the fourteenth century certainly farther from a literary dialect than Northumbria itself), how he tried to make a prose style that should do for prose something not too far below what Chaucer had done for verse. To a very great extent he succeeded, though he sometimes exceeded in the direction of literalness. Take him with Pecock, who was probably not twenty years his senior, and we see that his form, if not quite so interesting to the historian, is far more adapted for general literature; take him with Malory, who was probably of his own age, and we find from a different point of comparison the same result. It is clear that Caxton was in at least two senses a man of letters, that he had the secret of literary craftsmanship.

The middle third of the fifteenth century appears to have been less fruitful in the birth-dates of persons important in literature than any period of equal length for the last six hundred years at least. Indeed between Caxton, who was probably born about 1415, and Fisher, who was (again probably) born just about half a century later, it would not appear that a single writer of the slightest importance in the history of English prose first drew in English air. But the last thirty or thirty-five years of the century did something to

clear away the reproach with Lord Berners (1467-1532), Fisher himself (1465-1535), Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), Sir Thomas Elyot (1488-1546), and the early controversialists and Biblical translators of the Reformation, among whom, from the point of view of prose, Cranmer probably and Latimer certainly take the first rank. Of Berners we have spoken; the others must have some notice here.

Justice to Fisher's character as a man, an ecclesiastic, and (with allowances for a certain want of strength) a politician has been done for a long time; indeed, even at the times when anti-"Popish" feeling ran highest in England, his fidelity to honour and conscience, and his hapless fate, had preserved him from obloquy. But it was not till the republication of his English works by Mr. Mayor for the E.E.T.S.[1] that it was possible for justice to be generally done to his position in the history of prose. He was a Yorkshireman, was born at Beverley, and was educated at Cambridge, where, through his connection with Lady Margaret, the mother of Henry VII., he had much to do with the founding of Christ's and St. John's Colleges. His patroness made him her confessor in 1502, the next year he became the first incumbent of her professorship of divinity, while in another twelvemonth he was made Bishop of Rochester and Chancellor of his University. For many years he was an active bishop, a great friend to the new classical learning, and a *persona grata* at the courts both of Henry VII. and his son. The affair of the divorce alarmed his conscience, and he seems to have been the dupe of the "Maid of Kent"; while his election to the Cardinalate, after he had been imprisoned for treason, so irritated the passionate king that he beheaded Fisher as a practical repartee.

Fisher.

Fisher's English works as yet published consist of a long Treatise, practically made up of Sermons, on the Penitential Psalms, a funeral Sermon on Henry VII., another on Lady Margaret, a third against Luther, and a fourth preached on Good Friday, with two little tractates written in prison, a Spiritual Consolation to his sister Elizabeth, and the Ways to Perfect Religion. Thus almost the whole of his work is oratorical at least in profession. But this matters little, for the whole literature of the time was so saturated with the idea of "rhetoric" that everything took more or less the rhetorical if not oratorical turn. And Fisher's rhetoric never has the very least touch of the impromptu about it. On the contrary, he is one of the very earliest

His advances in style.

[1] 1876. Good judges had, however, always appreciated Fisher, and he duly figures in the remarkable *Specimens of Prose Writers* (3 vols. London, 1807), to which George Burnett gave his name, but of which Burnett's friend, comrade at Balliol, and fellow-"Pantisocrat," Southey, was the real inspirer.

English writers in whom we can discern the deliberate selection and practice of certain means and methods wholly to achieve style. He has got beyond the painful effort of Pecock to forge a vocabulary and arrange a syntax capable of conveying the effects of Latin argument in the vernacular. He is not, like Caxton, endeavouring dimly to get in English results (what, he does not quite understand) as pleasant as those of French. He has already discovered, and deliberately experiments for, rhetorical effect, with the peculiar resources provided by the double dictionary—Teutonic and Romance—of English, as well as by the more general devices of cadence, parallelism, and the usual figures of speech. The simple but extraordinarily effective plan of coupling a "Saxon" and a Latin word, which is so noticeable in the Authorised Version of the Bible, and which may have arisen before the rhetorical advantage of it was perceived, from the mere convenience of addressing one term to "lered" and the other to "lewed" folk, appears in him constantly "Wood" [mad] and "cruel," "horrible" and "fearful," "bruckle" [brittle] and "frail," "end" and "conclusion," and a thousand more stud his pages. Further, he has discovered the effectiveness—more dangerous and more likely to surfeit—of the triplet—"fasting, crying, and coming to the choir," "worldly honours, worldly riches, and fleshly pleasures." Inversion, a device so naturally suggested by the different order of Greek, Latin, and English, has no secrets for him, and, as inversion always does, suggests cadence. He is aware of the assistance given in colouring and varying prose effect by the admixture of long and short sentences; and it is scarcely too much to say that we find in him, and for the first time, examples of the rhetorical, as well as of the logical, construction and use of the paragraph. Side by side with his classical grace he has something of the vernacularity of Latimer, and he makes use of the quaint mystical and allegoric comparisons, which the Middle Ages elaborated from Scriptural and patristic use, with a felicity which occasionally does not come much short of that of the greatest rhetoricians of the seventeenth century. In fact, were it not for the spelling and for the obligatory Latin quotations, he is altogether wonderfully in advance of his time.

More.

Fisher's great companion in misfortune, Sir Thomas More, holds a less distinguished position in the strict history of strictly English literature than is generally thought. His famous *Utopia* was never Englished by himself at all, nor by others till some time after his death. It is therefore quite preposterous to quote it under his name as belonging to English prose; we might as well include Homer, Froissart, and Machiavelli as English writers. His extensive polemical writing is not remarkable in style, and is spoilt by the violence which pervaded both sides in

Reformation controversy. To speak of him, therefore, as "the Father of English prose" is to apply a silly phrase in a fashion monstrously unhistorical. Even the *History of Richard III.*, which is his chief claim, and (if his) a sound one, to a place in the story of style, has been much overpraised. The eulogies of critics like Hallam were probably determined by the fact that it is an early and not unhappy example of the rather colourless "classical" prose, of which a little later we shall find the chief exponents to be Ascham and his friends at Cambridge. It is, of course, a good deal better than Capgrave, and it is free from Pecock's harshness and crudity of phrase. But as it cannot on the one hand compare for richness, colour, and representative effect with the style of Berners, one of the two best writers of prose nearly contemporary with More, so it is not to be mentioned with that of Fisher, the other, for nice rhetorical artifice and intelligent employment of craftsman-like methods of work. But it is much more "eighteenth century" than either, and this commended it to Hallam; while More's pleasant wit and great intellectual ability naturally set it above the work of mere translators or compilers. Sir Thomas has a secure place in English history, and no mean one in that very interesting history of works of distinction composed in Latin, since the arrival of the vernaculars at years of discretion, which has yet to be written. But his place in the strict History of English literature is very small, and not extraordinarily high.

As Fisher occupies the most commanding position among the divines of the time in reference to original and skilful handling of English style, so the opposite side furnished the most remarkable and successful examples of what could be done by carrying out his principles. Tyndale, the next competent translator of the Bible to Wyclif, is more noteworthy for his hapless fate and for a vigorous controversial pen, than for distinct literary merit; but Latimer, Coverdale, and Cranmer must be better spoken of. Hugh Latimer[1] indeed—who was born in 1489 of a family of Leicestershire yeomen, was educated at Clare Hall, Cambridge, became Bishop of Worcester in 1535, and was burnt in 1555 at Oxford—holds a very important and somewhat peculiar position, ranking with Bunyan, Cobbett, and in a lesser degree Defoe, as the chief practitioner of a perfectly homely and vernacular style. Such a style naturally connects itself with an intense egotism; and Latimer is as egotistic, though not as arrogant, as Cobbett himself. He was a thoroughly honest and a thoroughly practical man, no partisan in the bad sense (that is to say, in the way of winking at practices by friends which he would have stormed against in foes),

Latimer.

[1] Latimer is well presented in two little volumes of Mr. Arber's invaluable Reprints, *The Ploughers* and *Seven Sermons*.

with all the taste of the common people for vivid homely illustration, and sometimes, as in the universally known description of the paternal household, capable of extraordinarily graphic presentment of fact. Beyond the range of personal description and shrewd, unadorned argument or denunciation his literary gifts would probably not have extended in any case very far. But as a popular sermon-writer in his own days, or as a popular journalist in these, he had in the one case, and could have had in the other, but very few rivals and no superiors. Nor is it improper to notice that his raciness and vernacularity were specially useful as correctives of the rather monotonous correctness which the imitation of Ciceronianism in English was likely to bring in.

The merits of Coverdale and Cranmer are rather matters of imputation and lending than of certain attribution by right, the claims of the one resting on his supposed principal share of the merits of the early Tudor translations of the Bible, those of the other partly on this, but still more on his reputed authorship of a large part of the Edwardian Liturgy. Miles Coverdale, who was born in Yorkshire about 1488, and educated at Cambridge, became a Protestant exile on the Continent, and was busy on more versions than one of the Scriptures, chiefly in the fourth decade of the sixteenth century. He became Bishop of Exeter in 1551, and though he suffered imprisonment in the Marian persecution, was not restored later, dying in 1569 as merely an incumbent. If (which does not seem to be absolutely certain) he was the actual translator of the Bible of 1535 which goes by his name, there is no doubt that some of the best phrasing, for sound and sense, of the great Authorised Version is originally due to him. His prologue and other editorial matter certainly seems to contain not a little of the peculiar music which has always been associated with the English Bible, and which the revisers of a few years ago showed such extraordinary ability in removing whenever they had an opportunity. It must, however, be said that even for this quality there are advocates of Tyndale's claims in opposition to Coverdale.

Coverdale.

The praise claimed for Cranmer—that of being the chief author of the Collects and Prayers of the Anglican Liturgy—is even higher, inasmuch as the matter, though necessarily showing common forms of phrase and common stocks of matter, is more original. Cranmer was born in Nottinghamshire in 1489, became a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, took a great (at least large) part in the affair of the divorce, and without holding any bishop's see previously, was appointed direct to the Primacy at Warham's death in 1532. He was burnt at Oxford in 1556. His character as a man does not concern us. But it is only fair to say

Cranmer.

that the considerable body of his doctrinal and controversial works displays, as far as the matter will admit, a command of melodious word-arrangement not much inferior to that which is to be found *passim* in the Liturgy. The truth seems to be that this peculiar style—the swan-song of Middle English transferred from verse to prose—was less the property of any individual man than abroad in the air at the time; and that it found utterance whenever fit voice and fit matter came together, from Malory to Cranmer and from Berners to Coverdale. Hardly ever afterwards could the touch of archaism be attained without deliberate *pastiche;* never before could the writers boast the possession of a full vocabulary and a tolerably exercised practice. The rude vulgarity of partisan controversy, the learned dulness of argumentative exposition, often mar this music; but where, as in the Prayer-book, the matter indited is of the best, then the style is of the best likewise—of such a best as was never again to be naturally produced, and hardly ever to be imitated by the most loving and delicate art.

INTERCHAPTER IV

THE general lessons of the fifteenth century [1] are rather unusually easy to disentangle; indeed, the very want of intrinsic, and so misleading, interest leaves these lessons all the more exposed.

In poetry we have little or no progress to chronicle, and a surprisingly small amount of positive achievement, this latter being found almost wholly in the small group of the better Scottish poets and in the anonymous writers of ballads and carols. Negatively the century may be said to have done at least one very good thing —to have shown by the repeated practice of persons, sometimes possessed of actual genius, that the revived alliterative schemes, even crutched and bolstered with rhyme and stanza arrangement, would not do. Also, in pursuing another branch of the same poetic maze of "passages that lead to nothing," it may be said to have shown very clearly the danger of a too stiff and elaborate poetic diction. Otherwise its poetical practice, in the higher and more regular poetic kinds, was a rather touching, but for the most part hopelessly unsuccessful, attempt to make one good custom corrupt the world, to continue Chaucerian form and Lorrisian matter long after the latter had lost any real connection with poetic power, and without the gifts of language, of humour, of study of nature and humanity, which had given value to the former.

Yet there had more than possibly arisen during this very time—there had to a certainty come into far more extensive use than ever before, a kind of popular and only half-literary poetry, which was gradually to supply solvents for this stiffness, breath and life for this lack of inspiration, to stir the blood of the great new literary poets of the next age like a trumpet, to give Shakespeare himself scraps worth decking his own fabric with, models for his own unapproachable and inestimable lyrics, and last, but far indeed from least, by the very irregularity of its apparently artless art, to maintain and to

[1] As in the case of Middle English, there is no single book to which the student can be referred for this period; the section appertaining in Mr. G. Gregory Smith's *Transition Period* (Edinburgh, 1900) will be found most useful.

extend that sort of liberty which is the glory and the essence of English poetry. It is a curious thing that this liberty has been, throughout our history, in much more danger than the political freedom which has occupied historians at such length, simply because the attempts on it have been made not by tyrants from without but by mistaken persons from within. Even now there are folk who will not face the plain fact that Chaucer allowed himself trisyllabic feet, but try to get him into the hard-and-fast dungeon of the decasyllable by slurs and elisions and all manner of unnatural tricks. His own immediate successors no doubt tried to tell their syllables as exactly as they told their beads. But the blessed liberty of the ballad was beside them all the time, and served as an alternative to and a protest against their theory.

Very closely connected with this matter is the already noted change of pronunciation which certainly went on throughout the century, though we are in the profoundest ignorance of its details, and can only dimly appreciate its results in the new verse of Surrey and Wyatt afterwards. A good deal, no doubt, was due to the increasing disuse and at last total abolition of the final *e*, with the consequent substitution of plurals in *s* for *es* and the like, the dropping of the infinitive *en*, and all the rest of it. For it must be (though it is not always) remembered that a process of this kind is a very far-reaching one. You cannot merely cut a syllable off a word and leave the sound-value of the rest as it was. The lopping and topping, in at least some cases, must affect the balance of the word, shift its centre of gravity, alter its relations to other words in the verse or the sentence. The strange tricks played, for instance, by Wyatt with the syllable *eth*, and his apparent belief in the propriety of rhyming it by itself, without any regard to what comes before, must have ultimate reasons of this sort, though we may, even as in a glass darkly, have difficulty in seeing what they were. So, too, the increasing isolation of the country and the language, as both strengthened the disuse of the glib trilingualism which distinguished such a man as Gower, must, with other subtle and obscure influences of the same kind, have had effect. We see something of this effect in the half-defiant, half-despairing doggerel of Skelton, as well as in the patient plodding of Hawes.

The details of the uprising of the great hybrid between poetry and prose—Drama—we still, for the same reasons of convenient juxtaposition, reserve to the next Book; but more even than in the last Interchapter it is important to observe that its earlier forms were now perfectly familiar to the English nation, if they had as yet (till the very close of the period) scantily commended themselves to the regular practitioners of English literature. The mystery and

miracle-play had perhaps for centuries—certainly for some century and a half—been practised by the not always rude mechanicals of probably every great town in the kingdom. The farce-interludes, originally introduced to prevent the effect being too solemn, springing naturally out of such scriptural incidents as the Tower of Babel, or grafted without too much violence, as in the famous "Mak" scenes of the *Second Shepherds' Play*, had gradually detached themselves, and constituted almost an independent kind. The Morality was simply the dramatisation of the *Rose* allegory—the favourite matter of the time thrown into what was fast becoming its favourite form. That religious feeling after the Reformation exaggerated the dislike of Catholicism for dramatic performance as such, and did not maintain the exceptional tolerance for religious drama, mattered little. The excessive earnestness and sternness of the time required easement in some direction, and found it in this; nor was it till nearly a century and a half after the close of our period that Puritanism could have its way with the drama.

Of prose, as the details given in the last chapter sufficiently show, it is possible to speak with less allowance. That the period gives one of the best books in English literature may be partly, though it certainly is not wholly, an accident; that the translations, not yet final, but substantively formed, of the Bible and the adaptations of the Liturgy at its close have supplied nearly four centuries since with models of exquisite cadence, of enchanting selection and arrangement of vocabulary, is, if not an accident, the result of a concatenation of circumstances not all of which—not even the most of which—are literary.

But it is no accident, it is of the essence of the literary history and development of the time, that the resources, the practice, the duties, the opportunities of prose continue during the whole course of the period steadily to expand, to subdivide themselves, to acquire diversity, adequacy, accomplishment. That this is done for the most part through the medium of translation and compilation does no harm, but on the contrary does a great deal of good; that a certain amount of the practice is in the nature of not always successful experiment is nothing to be ashamed of, or to be annoyed at, but, on the contrary, a fair reason for satisfaction and pride. No single secret of the greatness of English literature exceeds in importance the fact that Englishmen have never been satisfied to import or to copy a literary form bodily from any other language or country, as Spain adopted Italian artificial poetry, and as France adopted the Senecan drama; and this has of itself necessitated constant and very often unsuccessful experiment before the right kind or the right adjustment has been hit upon.

It is scarcely too much to say that the fifteenth century, with a few years backward into the fourteenth and onwards into the sixteenth, plays the same part in regard to English prose that the thirteenth century, with probably (for our knowledge is dimmer here) a few years backward into the twelfth century and certainly more than a few forward into the fourteenth, plays in regard to English verse. The necessary stocks of material, some of which will have to be rejected, are accumulated; the necessary plant and methods of working, not a little of which will have to be perfected, are slowly and painfully elaborated. Additional lateness in time, and perhaps less difficulty in kind, give us indeed a more perfect result in Malory's prose than we can find in the verse of any poet between Layamon and Hampole; but *mutatis mutandis* the historical position is the same, and the historical gains and results not so very different. No single prose writer, not even Hooker, was in any near future to do for the one what Chaucer in the later fourteenth century did for the other, but that again was a consequence of the necessities of the case.

It is not the least of the advantages and pleasures of that historical study of literature which has, with halting footsteps, it is true, at last followed the historical study of politics and social development, that it provides these "condolences," these "vails" in the seemingly dullest period of the actual literary course. The airy generaliser may flap his wing disdainfully at the fifteenth century and hurry to pastures more succulent; the merely indolent person may decline the labour necessary to acquaint himself with it. But both will do what they do, and decline what they decline, at their peril. Nor, while criticism accompanies history, is there any peril on the other side. There is not the least danger of any but pedants—that is to say, the same genus as the generalisers, but a different species of it—neglecting Shakespeare or Spenser because they take the pains to read Barclay and Bokenam. Yet shall those who decline to take notice of Barclay and Bokenam run no small risk of not fully understanding even Spenser, even Shakespeare.

BOOK V

ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE TO THE DEATH OF SPENSER

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARIES—DRAMA

Unbroken development of Drama from Miracle Plays—Origin of these—The Miracle-Play cycles, etc.—Non-sacred episodes—Moralities—*The Four Elements*—Other Interludes—John Heywood and *The Four PP*—*Thersites*—Other Interludes—Their drift—Bale's *King John*—*Ralph Roister Doister*—*Gammer Gurton's Needle*—*Gorboduc*—Other early attempts—The demand and the supply—Early plays by Gascoigne and others—Disputes as to plays—Difficulties in their way.

THE outburst of English Drama is so pre-eminently the glory of the Elizabethan period of literature proper, that it has seemed on the whole better to take no detailed notice in the preceding Books of the early experiments—not very early, not very numerous, and not of the first importance in literature—which we possess in that literary kind. Among other advantages of postponing the treatment of these to this special place, not the least is the emphasis which can perhaps best be given by such an arrangement to a protest against certain sentences of the late Professor Morley's—sentences astonishing in so careful a student of literature and so attached a lover of the drama. "The Modern Drama," says Mr. Morley,[1] "did not in any way arise out of the Miracle Plays. Miracle plays did not pass into morality plays; nor did moralities afterwards pass into the dramas. The modern drama arose out of the study and imitation of classical plays in schools and universities." Of these assertions the first three must be directly traversed, and the fourth largely corrected. The modern

Unbroken development of Drama from Miracle Plays.

[1] *English Plays*, p. 2.

drama *did* arise out of the Miracles. The Miracles *did* pass into the Moralities. The Moralities *did* pass into modern dramas. And though the imitation of the ancient classical drama, and its performance in schools and universities, coloured, shaped, generally influenced, the modern drama most momentously, this drama no more arose out of them than Spenser arose out of Virgil, or Hooker out of Cicero.

According to the system adopted in this book, we need concern ourselves little with the thin and dubious subject of the earliest mediæval drama in Latin, and in the vernaculars other than English.

Origin of these.

It is sufficient to say that at last, probably about the tenth century, the extreme disapprobation with which the Church had always regarded dramatic performances —a disapprobation justified not only by the moral scandals of the ancient theatre but by its direct association with the persecution of Christianity—gave way very partially and very slowly, in obedience to the well-known principle of enlisting strong human tastes, as far as could be lawfully done, on the side of religion. Whether, as is sometimes and plausibly contended, this was partly the result of a natural and imperceptible development of the dramatic side of the Church services themselves may be left undecided. It is sufficient to say that we have from France Latin mystery or miracle plays which may be of the eleventh century, Latin mixed with a little French nearly as early, and plays wholly in French which are as old as the twelfth. It is possible, from notices that remain, that there may have been English, or partly English, plays, if not of this same century, at any rate of the thirteenth. But those that we have are much later, the earliest[1] of them not being older than the fourteenth. And whereas at least two famous examples remain of purely secular French plays from the thirteenth, nothing of the kind is found in English till the end of the fifteenth, if not even later. Further, though we have a few miracle plays proper—that is to say, plays the subjects of which are taken from the lives of the saints and the acts ascribed to Our Lady —the majority of them are mysteries, *i.e.* dramatisations of the sacred history. Those which were wont to be performed by the guilds or trades of the towns remain to us in four large collections and a few other batches and single examples. Of these some account may now be given.

[1] This is usually taken to be the *Harrowing of Hell*, first printed by Hallliwell, and assigned to the reign of Edward II. It is an interesting piece in not quite 250 lines of octosyllabic couplet, but rather rudimentarily dramatic. A prologue introduces it; Christ and Satan interchange some half-score speeches of summons and refusal; the janitor runs away, and our Lord, binding Satan, is welcomed by, and graciously answers, the patriarchs in turn.

The four great collections,[1] known by the names of their place of performance, are the York, Wakefield (also called Towneley, from the former owners of the MS.), Coventry, and Chester plays. The first extends to forty-eight pieces, and *may* go back to the middle of the fourteenth century; the second to thirty, the MS. being a century later; the Coventry (same date) to forty-two; and the Chester (of which we have no MS. older than the end of the sixteenth) to twenty-four. We have also one of a Newcastle cycle, one of a Dublin, an East-Anglian version of *Abraham and Isaac*, one Norfolk "Sacrament Play," besides the so-called "Digby Mysteries," and the oldest of all, the *Harrowing of Hell*, which has been thought to be possibly as old as the first quarter of the fourteenth century. The details of the performance of these, though very far from uninteresting, concern the history not of literature but of the stage. It is enough to say that they were usually divided among the handicrafts of a town, and performed by them on large movable stages or storied waggons in different open places. Of their strictly literary character some account is necessary.

The Miracle-Play cycles, etc.

As may be presumed from the great numbers contained in each collection, the individual play is very short as a rule, indeed rather an "Act" of the whole than a separate drama. But there is great diversity of length. For instance, the very interesting *Second Shepherds' Play* of the Towneley or Wakefield set has between 700 and 800 lines; the first of the York set does not go beyond 180. The metre in which they are written is extremely various. We find both rhyme and alliteration—the two being sometimes combined; long and short lines; lyrical stanzas of the most various and complicated kind, couplets, octosyllables alternately rhymed, and other variations—no single metre predominating with anything like the same distinctness as that shown by the octosyllabic couplet in the French analogues and originals.

A very little examination of these plays will show the astonishing fallacy of the proposition that the modern drama did not grow out of them. Miss Toulmin-Smith has drawn attention to the interesting fact that the York or Northern cycle of mystery plays bears a remarkable resemblance, in order and choice of subjects, to the

[1] These are now accessible in the following editions:—*York*, ed. Miss L. T. Smith, Oxford, 1885; *Chester*, ed. Deimling, Part I. E.E.T.S. 1892; *Towneley*, ed. England and Pollard, E.E.T.S. 1897; *Coventry*, ed. Halliwell, Shakespeare Society, 1841 (reprint in hand for E.E.T.S.); *Digby*, twice edited by Dr. Furnivall for the New Shakespeare Society in 1882, and for the E.E.T.S. in 1896. A most excellent selection from all these, with others from the *Harrowing of Hell* to early sixteenth-century pieces like *Thersites* and Bale's *King John*, will be found in Mr. A. W. Pollard's *English Miracle Plays* (Oxford, 1890).

invaluable Scripture-history paraphrase in verse called the *Cursor Mundi* (*vide* p. 71), also Northern, and probably not much anterior to the cycle itself in date. In fact, the development of verse-stories, sacred and profane, into prose tales on the one hand and dramas on the other, which we find exemplified in French, beyond all doubt took place after a similar fashion in English. And almost from the first in both languages we find the strict throwing of the Scripture history into narrative "by personages," as the instructive French phrase has it, incessantly diversified by, and gradually breaking up into, episodes and interludes of chiefly farcical matter, which are only indirectly connected, or not connected at all, with the main subject. Instances of indirect connection are to be found especially in the story of the Ark and of the Tower of Babel, both of which were fixed on almost from the first as opportunities for comic by-play and digression. The great instance of the sheer addition is the famous *Second Shepherds' Play* above referred to, where the rogueries of "Mak," the sheep-stealer, are simply though not unnaturally superadded to the Gospel story of "While shepherds watched their flocks by night." So the Magdalene legend gives the germ (of which authors eagerly avail themselves) not merely of comic, but of absolutely romantic treatment. In other words, *Secunda Pastorum* of the Towneley and the Digby *Magdalene* simply give us comedy and tragedy, or at least romantic drama, ready to hand, as additions in each case to the Bible matter. When these things, especially the farce parts, had once been given as zests and relishes, they were sure to be expected as a main element of the banquet, and by degrees to be presented by themselves.

Non-sacred episodes.

So again, nothing can be stranger or (except in so far as matters partly of opinion can never be said to be absolutely true or false) falser than the statement that the Morality did not arise out of the Miracle Play, and did not in turn hasten the modern. Drama, having by means of the miracle play, and the miracle play only, taken regular rank as a department of literature, and especially of popular literature, was bound to undergo in the order of its appearance the various changes which passed over literature generally. In other words, and descending from the general to the particular, it was certain to experience, and to show traces of, the overwhelming spirit of allegorising which came upon Europe in the late fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth century. It did show them very strongly indeed, and the result was the Morality. This naturally did not altogether supersede the Miracle Play proper; but it took place beside it, the Biblical personages of the older form giving place to personified abstractions exactly as the knights of romance proper gave way to the Grand-Amours and King

Moralities.

Harts of allegorical romance. The titles of the Moralities given in Mr. Pollard's excellent selection of this division of Drama—*The Castle of Perseverance*, *Every Man*, *The Four Elements*, *Magnificence*—will, without going further, suggest and almost fully explain the nature of this class of composition, and the list could be largely extended from French, and not a little from English, sources. Generally speaking, the Morality either morals the whole life of man after the fashion of Hawes and Douglas, or selects a particular vice or virtue for similar treatment. In form it does not differ much from a miracle play, though, being as a rule later, it shows the metrical and other changes of the time. Yet it maintains that singular indulgence in lyrical arrangement which has made some, hardly with exaggeration, call the Miracle Play itself the chief storehouse of formal lyric in Middle English.

This variety of drama has generally undergone, and must be said to a great extent to deserve, the reproach of being one of the very dullest divisions of literature. The fearful prolixity which attacked all letters during the fifteenth century did not spare it, and though English Moralities are perhaps shorter than French, the *Castle of Perseverance* above referred to extends to the very respectable, or disreputable, length of 3500 lines. By degrees either the name began to carry a damaging connotation with it, or the thing was felt to require relief. At any rate, the Interlude—it is not known exactly how or when—arose in its place. There is no certainty as to the extent to which the proper meaning of the term "interlude" attaches to this class of composition; but it continued, in name and substance both, to be composed for reading, if not for acting, in the remoter parts of England (especially Wales) till within the nineteenth century. Many interludes are simply moralities; but the obviously correcter meaning of the word corresponds closely to the French *farce*, and is so used of the interludes in Sir David Lyndsay's great Morality-*Sotie* (*vide ante*, p. 177). The farce-interlude naturally continued that farce-episode of the Miracles and Mysteries which has been already noticed; and though the regular French fashion of weaving mystery, morality, *sotie*, and farce in a tetralogy does not seem to have obtained with us, the Interlude gradually detached itself more and more from its companions.[1]

We shall see this very distinctly if we take the plays contained in the two first volumes of Hazlitt's *Dodsley*,[2] most, if not all, of which

[1] It is important and interesting to notice that in the work of the last of the "giant race before the flood," Shirley, we have actually subsisting examples of the Interlude proper, and its resultant play, in the *Contention of Honour and Riches* and *Honoria and Mammon*.

[2] 15 vols. London, 1874-76.

are of the Interlude kind. *The Four Elements* is of the kind nearest to a Morality, and indeed almost confusible with that. The characters are the Messenger (showing traces of classical influence), Nature (*Natura Naturata*), Humanity, Studious Desire, Sensual Appetite, The Taverner, Experience, Ignorance, "and if ye list ye may bring in a Disguising." As usual in this class of play, the *dramatis personae* so clearly betray the whole course of the action that one does not quite see what need there was for it, and rather understands the frequent disinclination of the early dramatist to provide these tell-tale *dramatis personae* at all. Humanity is coached by Nature, and more in detail by Studious Desire; becoming a little tired by this improving company, he is bewitched by Sensual Appetite, whom The Taverner seconds very zealously. Then come in Experience and Studious Desire, who talk Geography. Humanity is fought for by them on the one side, by Sensual Appetite and Ignorance on the other, and is left undecided, pleading his case with ambiguous arguments to the returning Nature. The whole of this piece, like most of the early dramas, is versified in a sort of doggerel which takes for basis sometimes a longer line, sometimes a shorter, and may be called, rather for convenience than strict exactitude, doggerelised heroic or Alexandrine and doggerelised octosyllable. The whole class of metre exemplifies the same influences which show themselves in Skelton and have been already discussed. The piece dates probably from the first or second decade of the sixteenth century.

The Four Elements.

Calisto and Meliboea is a rendering of the famous Spanish satiric medley of the *Celestina*. *Every Man* and *Hick Scorner* are again moral interludes, but with a difference, the first inclining to the general lines of the Morality as above given, the second a very early example (it was printed by Wynkyn de Worde) of the invective so frequent in English against the deboshed youth who returns from foreign travel all the worse for it. Allegorical characters, however, are almost as freely introduced in the one as in the other, and the metre is still doggerel. *The World and the Child* and *God's Promises* are, the first a pure Morality, the second a cross between Morality and Mystery. On the other hand, *The Pardoner and the Friar*, which is one of the works of John Heywood, the chief named author of this stage of drama, has nothing allegorical about it, but is a lively satire on the two professions with plenty of rough humour and horse play.[1]

Other Interludes.

[1] Fairholt's Percy Society ed. of Heywood's *Wit and Folly* gives plentiful extracts in its Introduction from his other works, *The Play of Love*, *The Play of the Wise Men*, *The Husband*, *Wife*, *and Priest*, which all more or less answer the description in the text. His *Proverbs* and *Epigrams* were reprinted by the Spenser Society, 1867. The whole *Works* appear in two vols. of Farmer's *Early English Dramatists* (London, 1905-6).

John Heywood was a Londoner possessed of some property. He was educated at Broadgates Hall, Oxford, and is said to have been a friend of More. He seems to have been a consistent Roman Catholic, and after some trouble in Edward's reign became one of the few literary favourites of Mary, and exiled himself after her death, dying at an uncertain period some twenty years after Elizabeth's accession. His son Jasper Heywood was also a man of letters. John, besides being a dramatist as far as his time admitted, was a writer of epigrams and proverbs. *The Four PP* is a really amusing farce in doggerel shorts and longs, wherein a Palmer, a Pardoner, a Pothecary, and a Pedlar tell tales of their own and each other's trades, and compete which shall tell the greatest lie—the prize being won, as many know who never read the play, by the Palmer's assertion that he never saw a woman out of temper. The fun is rather infantine, and the literary merit not great; but the advance on any previous dramatic matter in going direct to character for the interest, and the incidental allusion to places and manners, make it important.

John Heywood and *The Four PP*.

Another piece, trivial in itself but important for our purpose, is *Thersites*, which seems by some allusions to the birth of Edward VI. to be dated pretty exactly at 1537. It is a sort of Morality of Boasting, in Interlude form and with concrete characters instead of abstractions—to wit, Thersites himself; Mulciber, a smith; Mater, a mother; Miles, a knight; and Telemachus, a child. Mulciber, at Thersites' request, makes him arms, the dialogue including a great deal of play on the word "sallet," as, but much more briefly, in Shakespeare.[1] The braggart's mother begs him not to endanger himself, but he scorns her and brags ever more loudly. He engages in combat with a snail, and after much vaunting and horseplay claims the victory, because the beast draws in its horns. Miles, who has supervened, suggests himself as a worthier antagonist; but Thersites runs away and hides behind his mother, who succeeds in protecting him. Then Telemachus brings a letter from Ulysses, and the mother is forced by her ungrateful son's violence to pronounce elaborate burlesque charms on the pair, till Miles returns and drives Thersites off.

Thersites.

All this is, of course, excessively childish, but we must remember that it was the actual childhood of the drama, that the mere gain of live persons for abstractions was immense, and that, after all, these plays were still a mere expansion of the burlesque interludes and passages in the miracles. The drama was only in a go-cart, but it was learning to walk.

The *Interlude of Youth* relapses upon general characters, but

[1] 2 *Henry VI.* iv. 10.

endows them with greater life and individuality than is usual in the Morality scheme; and the same may be said of the not very differently named *Lusty Juventus*, which, however, is both longer and heavier. *Jack Juggler* forms a curious pair with *Thersites*. There we had classical names for a modern farce; here a classical drama, the *Amphitryon*, is travestied, though only to the extent of the misfortunes of Sosia, not those of Amphitryon himself. The title-hero plays the part of Mercury out of mere mischief, to tease and annoy Jenkin Careaway. The piece is one of the liveliest of its class, and shows the beneficial effect which the imitation and engrafting of the classical drama on the native stocks was producing. But it also shows most unmistakably that the modern play did not arise out of imitation of the classical drama alone, or even principally. The *Nice Wanton* is noteworthy for being neither allegorical nor the dramatisation of any known story—for though the names Dalilah and Xantippe are used for the light heroine and the shrew her mother, no incident or condition associated with the names themselves is brought in. Xantippe has three children, Barnabas, Ismael, and Dalilah, of whom the first is a good child, and the two others ne'er-do-wells, who are easily seduced by the Iniquity[1] of the piece, and both come to the worst of ends. The *History of Jacob and Esau* is simply the Bible story dramatised, no longer according to miracle-play conditions, but to those of the interlude-morality. And *The Disobedient Child* has once more an attempt at originality. It is the dramatised story of an imprudent marriage, by which the bridegroom offends his father, and only obtains a violent shrew for a wife. There is not much dramatic ability about it, but it displays more attention to style and literary language than most, and is, indeed, said to be the work of a Cambridge man, Thomas Ingeland.

Other Interludes.

Lastly, the *Marriage of Wit and Science* returns to the pure Morality scheme as regards plot and personages, but is regularly divided into acts and scenes, and has some attempt at orderly dramatic presentation. The *New Custom*, the *Trial of Treasure*, and other pieces of the same kind do not add anything very new to the list of varieties obtainable from the above analysis.

But we can see quite sufficiently from it how, just as the Morality is the Miracle or Mystery, with Qualities, Virtues, Vices, personified States of Life, and so forth substituted for Scripture characters, so the Interlude is the Morality, sometimes merely changed in name, more often lightened in the farce direction as regards handling, and adapted to a very wide range

Their drift.

[1] Here a "Vice" in both senses—clown and tempter. The Vice, as is well known from the Shakespearian use, was often merely or mainly the former.

of subjects—scriptural, moral, classical, social, and what not—with a constantly increasing tendency towards the adoption of the regular classical division of acts and scenes, and towards the independent selection and working out of dramatic stories, invented or borrowed, in such a fashion that the resultants must fall, not into the arbitrary divisions of Mystery, Morality, or Interlude, but into the natural ones of Tragedy, Comedy, and that mixed kind which is perhaps most conveniently, though rather improperly, named "Drame" in French. There is still no reason for displacing from their position as early, if not certainly the earliest, representatives of comedy, tragedy, historical drama, and farce, the famous pieces entitled *Ralph Roister Doister*, *Gorboduc*, *King John*, and *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. Romantic drama, an original kind and a high one, was naturally not so early, and we do not meet with real examples of it before Lyly and Peele.

Of these, Bishop Bale's *King John*,[1] which has been dated about 1547, is the least important, and its right to be regarded as the first of our historical dramas has even been denied, on the plea that it is only a didactic interlude with a historical subject. This seems a little hard, for Bale is surely entitled to the credit of seeing that the didactic interlude—that is to say, the play in the only state it had then reached—was capable of being applied to historical subjects, and so becoming the historic play in time. His object here, as in all his other literary work, was no doubt polemical—to advance the cause of the Reformation by exhibiting the patriotic objection to the power of the Pope; and his play does not exhibit much dramatic grasp. But he had already written Protestant mysteries, and evidently had a pretty clear inkling of the popularity and possibilities of the drama. In particular the way in which the *personifications* in *King John*—Dissimulation, Private Wealth, Usurped Power, become *persons*—Stephen Langton, Cardinal Pandulph, the Pope—is a thing which, whether definitely intended or not, is of the widest reach and suggestion. He chiefly employs the long slinging rhymed doggerel which, as has been noted, is the standard metre of this entire class of transition plays.

Bale's *King John*.

The three others are of more importance. *Ralph Roister Doister*,[2]

[1] Ed. Collier, Camden Soc., 1838. Bale, a Suffolk man, born near Dunwich in 1495, went to Jesus College, Cambridge, took orders, married, fled to Germany in 1547, became Bishop of Ossory in 1552, fled again under Mary, and on returning received from Elizabeth a prebend at Canterbury. He died in 1563. Bale was not a very bright example of a Reformer in all ways, but he wrote a good deal, including a bibliography (one of the first) of English literature, and no less than twenty-two plays, of which five only, in whole or part, survive. These, except *King John*, are sacred-moral in type.

[2] In Hazlitt's *Dodsley*, iii. Also separately in Mr. Arber's *Reprints*.

the oldest and most accomplished in its own class, is the work of Nicholas Udall, successively headmaster of Eton and Westminster, who must have written it about or before 1550. Udall was a Hampshire man, and is supposed to have been about forty at his death in 1556. He was educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and was a good scholar as well as a harsh master (he whipped poor Tusser, the doggerel verse writer on husbandry, very much), a translator, and the author of some Latin plays on sacred subjects. But he would now be merely a name but for *Ralph Roister Doister*, the intrinsic merit of which is considerable, though it has been denied, and which as a *point de repère* in English literary history is simply of the first importance. It is indeed almost by itself sufficient to correct erroneous notions as to the parts respectively played by the Interlude and the classical play in the formation of the modern drama. A man who wrote *Ralph Roister Doister* without knowing or having heard of Plautus would no doubt be a genius of extraordinary originality; but a man who, knowing Plautus, and not having the traditions of the Miracle, Morality, and Interlude stage before him, imitated Plautus precisely after the fashion of *Ralph Roister Doister* would be an unintelligible portent. The plot, though simple, is far more complex, and, above all, far more regular, than that of any mere Interlude, but the play is wholly built on Interlude lines. Matthew Merygreek, an ingenious improvement upon the "Vice" of the earlier plays, out of mischief induces Ralph, a brainless braggart and simpleton beau, to pay court to Christian Custance, the betrothed of an absent merchant, Gawin Goodluck. The discomfiture of the gull, who is actually beaten off by Custance and her handmaids, the by-play of those handmaids themselves, the misunderstanding with Goodluck created by false reports, and the reconciliation, make a very fair dramatic scheme, which is carried out in rhymed doggerel of the middle length, not so short as that of most Interludes nor so long as that of *Gammer Gurton's Needle.*

Ralph Roister Doister.

This still more famous piece,[1] which contains (though some say it only borrows) one of the best convivial songs in the English language, was acted at Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1566. Its author, or supposed author, John Still, was a member of that college, and is guessed to have been born at Grantham about 1534, being thus a very much younger man than Udall, and, in fact, a member of another generation. In 1570 Still became a beneficed priest, in two years more Dean of Bocking, successively Master of St. John's and of Trinity, Vice-

Gammer Gurton's Needle.

[1] Hazlitt's *Dodsley, ibid.*

Chancellor of his University, and Bishop of Wells, where he died in 1608. He had lived to see the English drama (of which he had, *ex hypothesi*, written one of the first complete examples, and the first to be acted at either University) arrive at its highest perfection ; and it is said that when Vice-Chancellor he had to protest against the very practice, that of acting *English* plays at Universities, which he had initiated. The play, though a broad farce in tone, is arranged as a regular comedy, and the losing and finding of the needle which has been employed to mend the garments of Gammer Gurton's man, Hodge, is carried on by Hodge and the Gammer ; Tib, her maid ; Cock, her boy ; Diccon the Bedlam (mad beggar), the Vice or mischief-maker of the play ; a neighbour, Dame Chat, and her maid, Doll ; Master Baily, another neighbour, and his servant, Spendthrift ; Doctor Rat the Curate ; and Gib the Cat. The language is mainly dialect, and the vehicle, as observed above, is doggerel rhyme of the longest form—extending to fifteen or sixteen syllables. It is written with spirit and managed with skill, but unfortunately the language is of the coarsest kind—coarse even for this class of play, the authors of which are rarely refined. The magnificent drinking-song of "Back and side go bare, go bare," introduces the second act, has nothing particular to do with the action, and may be older than the play.

It is impossible to imagine a greater contrast to this jovial piece than the tragedy of *Gorboduc*,[1] or, as it is otherwise called, *Ferrex and Porrex*, which was published, though surreptitiously, a year before *Gammer Gurton's Needle* was performed, and had itself been acted five years earlier, in 1561. In the second and authorised edition, which did not appear till 1570, the name was changed as above given. The authorship has generally been attributed to Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, and though some champions of Sackville have tried to claim the whole for him, this is rather a mistaken partisanship. The rich and stately melody of the *Induction* and the *Complaint of Buckingham* (*vide infra*) certainly neither suggests nor requires to be eked out by the wooden dulness of this dreary play, which is simply of interest and importance (and it has a great deal of both) historically and not intrinsically. *Gorboduc.*

In structure *Gorboduc* is a regular play on the strictest model of Seneca the tragedian, with a slight concession to the popular taste in the matter of "dumb shows." Gorboduc himself is King, and Videna Queen, of Great Britain. They have two sons, Ferrex and Porrex, who quarrel, and four dukes, Cornwall, Albany, Logres, and Cumberland. Each prince has a counsellor, and each has a parasite. There is a messenger to tell Ferrex's death, and a messenger to tell

[1] See *Works of Thomas Sackville*, ed. Sackville-West, London, 1859.

the Duke of Albany's rebellion. The chorus consists of four ancient and sage men of Britain, and there are a secretary and a counsellor to the King to make up the tale of pairs or quartettes. No action happens on the stage, and the whole play, with the exception of the choruses (the stanzas of which bear some marks of Sackville's hand), is couched in correct but ineffably dreary decasyllables, in which the sense usually lapses with the line, and the whole stumps on with a maddening, or rather stupefying, monotony.

The full importance of *Gorboduc*, and of the imitations of the Senecan drama generally, will be better seen later, when we come to the actual period of Elizabethan drama proper; meanwhile it will be best to give some account of the productions of the "twilight" period—the first twenty or four-and-twenty years of the Queen's reign, when irregular and tentative experiments on the mixed lines of the Interlude in the broad sense and the classical play were frequent, and when the taste for dramatic entertainments was constantly growing, but when no one had as yet hit on a really promising vein to work. It is a division of literature which is not very easy for the historian. Little of it is of any intrinsic value; a great deal has disappeared, or has never been printed; of what is actually open to study most is anonymous, or practically so; and the real dates of nearly all the plays are very uncertain, owing to the interval which usually elapsed between performance and publication, and the invariable habit of writing up popular plays from time to time by the stock poets of the different companies.

Other early attempts.

Despite all the pains which have been spent on this very popular matter, the growth of the theatre proper—that is to say, of an establishment for the production of stage plays only—is still obscure. As generally happens in such matters, the most reasonable plan is to acquiesce in uncertainty on non-material points, and to recognise and hold fast by the material ones. For some two centuries probably, the acting of plays in one way or another by town guilds, by "servants" at court, by "servants" of the great houses, which were in effect minor courts, by monastic and collegiate-clerical households, etc., had been constantly increasing; and from the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards the appetite of the population generally had been thoroughly awakened. By degrees the trade performances, though they did not for some time disappear, dropped; and the monastic troops (if we may use the word) were cut off by the Dissolution; but the "children"—choristers of the great churches that survived the Reformation—and the "servants" of great houses remained. And yet, again, by degrees these "servants" formed themselves into regular companies, who, though they might retain for protection the

The demand and the supply.

name of some nobleman, were not really any longer members of his household, but gave themselves up entirely to satisfying the demand for plays. This demand had to be met on the producing side as well as the performing, and so came into being the profession of the dramatist, generally combined with other literary functions, but sometimes not so, and often including the vocation of actor, though sometimes also not.

The most important name of the dramatists of the early part of Elizabeth's reign, next to that of Sackville, is that of George Gascoigne,[1] some notice of whose life and other work will be found below. His dramatic production includes two pieces, both translations or adaptations from the Italian, *The Supposes*—a prose comedy, the first of the kind in English, from Ariosto, and *Jocasta*, a tragedy Englished (with Francis Kinwelmershe) not from any of the classical plays of Laius' line, but from Lodovico Dolce's *Giocasta*. But many other persons known and unknown fell into the new way. The *Cambyses* of Thomas Preston, Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and Master of Trinity, is said to be as old as *Gorboduc* itself. It is founded upon Herodotus, but is written partly in eights and sixes, partly in doggerel, has a Vice or purely comic character named Ambidexter, three comic ruffians, Ruff, Huff, and Snuff, and is altogether a curious compromise between an interlude and a regular play. The *Damon and Pythias* of Richard Edwards, acted three years later, and written by a Christ Church man, who was Master of the Children of the Queen's Chapel, is a more sober production in long doggerel, with hardly more than one comic episode or interlude, which turns on the favourite legendary character of Grim the Collier of Croydon. The short and curious *Appius and Virginia* by "R. B.," which has been thought to come between these, is not in doggerel but in regular fourteeners, or eights and sixes, rhymed sometimes in couplet, sometimes in quatrain; and the inevitable admixture of comedy, or rather horseplay, is unusually small. But the best piece of this kind and period is the *Tancred and Gismund* of Robert Wilmot, which was acted before the Queen in 1568, and republished in 1592. The blank verse of this (which was originally rhymed in quatrain), though much "stopped," is less wooden than that of *Gorboduc;* the fire of the original story in Boccaccio, which is so admirably revived in Dryden's version, is by no means absent; and the chief fault is the absence of any really dramatic action, and the alternation of the dialogue between tedious set speeches of enormous length and snip-snap stichomythia. But with these drawbacks *Tancred and Gismund* is the most poetical play before Peele and

Early plays by Gascoigne and others.

[1] Gascoigne's *Works*, ed. Hazlitt, London, 1868. Most of the others mentioned are in his *Dodsley*, vols. iv. *sqq*.

Lyly, if not before Marlowe. Of somewhat similar character, though nearly twenty years younger, and therefore belated in the dawn of the drama proper, is the odd *Misfortunes of Arthur*, performed at Greenwich Palace in 1587, and composed by a society of wits, among whom was no less a person than Francis Bacon, though the chief writing is said to have been due to Thomas Hughes. The verse of this—and indeed the tone generally—bears a strong relation to that of *Tancred and Gismund*. It has a chorus in elaborate stanzas, dealing with the death of the King, as related by Geoffrey rather than Malory, but introduces Welsh names (such as Angharad), which must have been due to Hughes's reading in his native language, and is altogether, if not exactly a successful play, a respectable literary curiosity. The stately gloom which seems so natural to, or so well affected by, this period of the eve of greatness is, out of Sackville, nowhere better shown than here.

Yet we have pretty certain evidence that these plays, and others, printed and unprinted, still extant, are but a small part of the actual theatrical production of the first twenty or thirty years of Elizabeth's reign. The lists of names that survive prove this, and prove further that almost every kind of literature, sacred and profane, classical and romantic, historical and imaginative, was being dramatised. But the historical bickerings about the whole question of stage plays prove it almost better. Full fifteen years before the appearance of the first plays of the University Wits in the early years of the eighth decade of the century, these bickerings appear. The Church had always suffered the theatre anything but gladly; and though the Puritans disagreed with the Church in almost all ways, here they went beyond her. The Corporation of London, like its analogues in most other towns, distinctly inclined to the ultra-Protestant party; and it was owing to the obstacles thrown by it in the way of stage-playing that the first regular theatres were, about 1576, built just beyond the City bounds, in the privileged district of Blackfriars, in Shoreditch, and elsewhere. And how strong the feeling ran both for and against plays at this time, from which we have no plays worth speaking of, is shown by the notable history of Stephen Gosson,[1] whose *School of Abuse*, an invective, partly delivered against poetry in general, but mainly against dramatic poetry, survives, though most of the literature which occasioned it is lost, who was himself a "University Wit" of a generation before Peele and Lyly, who succumbed to the fascination

Disputes as to plays.

[1] The plays of Gosson (1555-1624), *Catiline's Conspiracies*, *Captain Mario*, and *Praise at Parting*, must have been written long enough before 1579, the date of the *School of Abuse*, to allow for his conversion, and probably just after he took his B.A. at Oxford in 1576.

of the stage, wrote plays, acted in them, was converted from them by religious denunciations, dedicated his pamphlet, it may be presumed without permission, to Sir Philip Sidney, and thereby drew down on himself, though Sidney with characteristic courtesy does not name him in it, the famous *Apology for Poetrie* (*vide infra*, chap. iv.).

Still, active as was the demand, plentiful in a way as was the supply, and high as feeling ran in regard to the theatre generally, the entire work of this long period—it must have been nearly forty years from *Ralph Roister Doister* to *Tamburlaine*—is surprisingly rudimentary. The drama, though divesting itself gradually of some of its extremer crudities, made remarkably little progress towards any really fresh, vigorous, and promising form. It is easy enough to see now that writers, even if they had possessed more genius than any of those of this date show, might naturally have been hampered and bewildered. The mediæval forms, of which the latest phase was the Interlude, were slowly but inevitably passing into discredit, and were indeed quite incapable of serving as vehicles to any "intricate impeach" of character-drawing, of romantic interest, or of plot.[1] The classical, or at least Senecan, model which was forcing itself upon all Europe was alien from the English spirit, and unable to give voice or shape to English conceptions of drama. And what is more than this, even if there had been a style of play to give, there was as yet no style of verse to give it in. The impossible doggerels, longer and shorter, were indeed, as well as the fourteener, giving way to blank decasyllables; but the right mould of these had not been found. The writers, bewildered at the absence of their usual guide-rope, rhyme, feared to drop into absolute prose if they did not pull the verse up short at the end of the line; there was moreover, owing perhaps to mistaken deduction from Chaucer's practice, perhaps to transferred classical teaching, the superstition about middle cæsuras, that we find in Gascoigne, and long afterwards in Dr. Johnson. The Chaucerian tradition, though not fatal, was unfavourable to trisyllabic feet; and altogether the measure lacked the spring, the variety, the characteristics of roll and break by turns, which suit the dramatic wave.

Difficulties in their way.

[1] More study than has yet been given is deserved by the curious productions entitled *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*, etc., which were published in a group by Collier and included in Hazlitt's *Dodsley*. Their original dates are very uncertain; but they belong pretty clearly to the end of this present period; and in them we see the butterfly struggling to get out of the chrysalis in the oddest, but the most suggestive, manner.

CHAPTER II

PRELIMINARIES—PROSE

Elyot—The *Governour*—Cavendish—Leland—Cheke—Wilson—Ascham—His *Letters*—*Toxophilus*—The *Schoolmaster*—Their characteristics

THE middle stage between that older literature which continues till a period well, but not very far, within the sixteenth century, and Elizabethan literature proper, is at least as clearly marked in prose as in verse or drama, and it contains matter of perhaps greater intrinsic interest than is the case with drama at least. We have seen how with Fisher English prose reached, and perhaps for the first time, the state of deliberate and conscious practice of the devices of style, and how yet farther advance, conditioned in the most momentous manner by the nature of their occupation, appears in the work of the early Tudor translators of the Bible.

Contemporary with these latter were some other writers who have obtained a place, from which it is not necessary to oust them, in the history of English literature—Sir Thomas Elyot, Leland, Cavendish, perhaps a few more. The attraction of the first is indeed rather one of matter than one of manner, and it might be difficult to give any reason except the fact that it has been twice reprinted in the nineteenth century[1] for the position held by *The Boke named the Governour*, still more difficult to account for the reprinting itself. Sir Thomas Elyot, who was born before 1490, was the son of a judge, and though not a member of the famous Cornish family of his name, appears to have been a West Countryman, his forebears having been connected with the district round Yeovil. He must have been well educated, but does not seem to have gone to either University, and though a student of medicine, is said not to have been a practitioner thereof. He came early into the possession of a good estate near Woodstock, and settled there; but was made by Wolsey in 1523 Clerk of the Council—an office which seems to

Elyot.

[1] In 1854 by Mr. A. T. Eliot, and in 1883 by Mr. H. H. S. Croft (2 vols. London). The latter is the edition used.

have metaphysical connection with literature. He published the *Governour* in 1531, and seems to have been recommended by it to diplomatic employments, in which he spent the rest of his life. He died in 1546, having four years previously been elected M.P. for Cambridge.

He wrote a medical work called the *Castle of Health*, a Latin Dictionary, some dialogues, and other things; but his fame, such as it is, rests on the *Governour*. This is one, and in England one of the first, of those curious treatises, partly of politics, partly of education, which the study of the classics, and more particularly of Plato, multiplied at the Renaissance in all countries, and not least in our own. Ascham, Lyly, Mulcaster, and many others take up from their different points of view, more and less scholastic, the theme which Elyot set them the example of handling. Incidentally the book is remarkable, because it contains the earliest version yet traced of the famous, but too probably apocryphal, story of Chief-Justice Gascoigne and Henry V. when Prince of Wales —a pious invention very likely to flatter the powers that were. In the history of prose style Elyot is commendable rather than distinguished; free from obvious and glaring defects rather than possessed of distinct merits. He is rather too much given to long sentences; he has little or nothing of Fisher's rhetorical devices, and while the romantic grace of his not much older contemporary Berners is far from him, so also is the deliberate classical plainness of his not very much younger contemporary Ascham. He is principally valuable as an example of the kind of prose which a cultivated man of ordinary gifts would be likely to write before the definite attempts of Ascham and his school. The *Governour*.

George Cavendish, of the Suffolk Cavendishes, gentleman-usher to Wolsey, and the Cardinal's biographer, does the same service in showing the style of a contemporary less cultivated, but perhaps of greater natural powers, than Elyot, and not possessed of the special literary gift of Berners. We might almost call Cavendish a prose Berners—and his account of the greatness, decline, and fall of the Cardinal has something of Berners's charm. Cavendish.

On yet another hand, John Leland continues for us the useful, and at this time really important, function of the "literary hodmen," as they have been contemptuously and ungratefully termed. He was a Londoner, born about 1500; and after being thoroughly educated at St. Paul's School and at both Universities (Christ's College in the one, All Souls in the other), he travelled for a long time on the Continent and assimilated all the learning of the day. This was the time, 1533, when Henry VIII.'s Renaissance fancy for learning had not been checked or stunted by Leland.

his own passions and the course of events; and Leland, most fortunately, was furnished with a roving commission to examine the antiquities and libraries of England. His investigations anticipated the disorganisation in almost all cases, the ruin and destruction in some, that followed the Reformation, and his collections and records, touching not merely antiquities proper and topography, but literary history, are of inestimable value as regards matter. As regards form, Leland ranks with the two writers just mentioned, but below even Elyot so far as any particular charm of style is concerned. His phrase is sometimes quaint in itself, and always has the pleasant archaism of his time; but it possesses no individual savour, and is once more only the literary vehicle of a man who sets down what he wishes to set down clearly and without any decided solecisms, so far as the standard of correctness of his own time is fixed, but who neither has been taught any kind of "rhetoric" in the vernacular nor cares to elaborate one for himself.

Very different, and much greater, is the interest of a school or group of writers somewhat junior to these, who arose as practitioners of prose in the latest days of Henry VIII., but who attained their chief eminence in the reigns of his son and daughters. They were the direct and complete, as the others had been the partial and indirect, result of the new study of the classics, and especially of Greek, and as it happened, though that study had begun earlier at Oxford, they were all members of the University of Cambridge. These were John, afterwards Sir John, Cheke, Thomas Wilson (to whom subsequent knighthood is also granted by some but denied by others), and Roger Ascham. All were of importance—if not quite of equal importance.

Cheke was a Cambridge man not merely by education but by birth, and was slightly the oldest of the three, as Wilson was much the youngest. He was born in 1514, and after a Grammar School education became a member, and in 1539 a Fellow, of St. John's College, while three years later he "taught Cambridge Greek" as Regius Professor, and two years later again, "King," or rather Prince, "Edward" as tutor. He was lavishly rewarded by his pupil or his pupil's ministers, and received abbey-lands, the Provostship of King's, knighthood, and a privy councillorship. He was implicated in the design to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne, and though after imprisonment he escaped abroad, he allowed himself to be caught, and had to disgorge at least some of his gains, and to recant his Protestantism under Mary. Nor did he survive to see the wheel turn again under Elizabeth. Like so many of his generation, he appears to have been a time-server, greedy, a sycophant, and of no personal sense of honour or

Cheke.

consistency ; but a sincere lover of learning and an eager promoter of the above mixed scheme of mental education and political training. In philology and in English composition he had some crotchets and a good deal of innovating vivacity. He altered the pronunciation of Greek ; he tried to alter the spelling of English ; and (as we have seen from Pecock's practice) not exactly for the first time, he endeavoured to introduce a "Saxon" diction at the same time that he shared, and perhaps caused, Ascham's predilection for the balanced Latinised sentence, adjusted rather to Greek than to Latin in its simple arrangement and order of words. Cheke's position in this history is rather one of influence than of performance, and his actual composition was mainly, though not wholly, in Latin.

Thomas Wilson, a Lincolnshire man, passed through Eton to King's College, Cambridge, of which he became a Fellow in 1549, and was tutor to the sons of the Duke of Suffolk. He fled the country at Edward's death, and remained abroad during the whole of Mary's reign, though he suffered actual torture and danger of his life from the Inquisition at Rome. Elizabeth showed him great favour, making him Master of St. Katharine's Hospital (which he is said to have robbed or tried to rob), Secretary of State, envoy to divers countries, and even Dean of Durham, though he had never taken orders. He became M.P. and (as some say) a knight, and died in 1581, being then about fifty-five. His works are various, and all remarkable as examples of practice, but the chief of them, the *Art of Rhetoric*,[1] which appeared in 1553, when he was about seven-and-twenty, combines practice with theory. It is, as a matter of course, in great part modelled upon Quintilian, and the rhetoricians of the School from Martianus Capella onwards, but part is original. And in this part Wilson expresses with great vigour sentiments similar to those of Cheke and Ascham, as to the importance of writing English matters in English, and for Englishmen, of avoiding strange "ink-horn" terms, and affected Chaucerisms (this is a valuable date-point), as to the "foolish fantastical who Latin their tongues." And he has also the strong moral tone which, though his own practice and Cheke's might be a little wanting in some respects, distinguishes the whole school. Wilson.

Neither Cheke, however, nor even Wilson can be called a great or even a distinguished writer; Roger Ascham[2] is certainly the latter, if not quite the former. He was a Yorkshire man, born in

[1] Recently reprinted at the Clarendon Press. I use 2nd (fuller) ed. 1563.

[2] Works including *Letters*, ed. Giles, 4 vols. (nominally 3) London, 1865. *English Works*, ed. Aldis Wright (Cambridge, 1 vol.). *Toxophilus* and the *Schoolmaster* are in Mr. Arber's *Reprints*.

1515, of a fair stock. He entered St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1530, and learnt Greek from his scarce elder Cheke, becoming Fellow of his college early, and before very long University Reader in Greek and Public Orator. He dedicated *Toxophilus*, in 1545, to Henry VIII., and under Edward became tutor to the Princess Elizabeth, and Secretary of an Embassy to Germany. Nobody quite knows how, without any overt recantation, he not only remained unmolested under Mary, but was actually made her secretary; while he was also favoured by his old pupil after her accession. His second chief work, the *Schoolmaster*, was written late, and not published till after his death in 1568. Even this brief story shows that he must either have had extraordinary luck, or have been not entirely destitute of the "willow" character which infected almost all public men in Tudor days. There are also indications in his very pleasant *Letters* that he was by no means free from the rather shameless tendency to beg which was common to all but a very few scholars throughout the Renaissance. But these epidemic, or rather endemic, vices of the time excepted, Ascham appears to have been a very agreeable specimen of a good type of Englishman: humorous, except for a touch of Puritan prudery in regard to art and literature; learned, and much more ready to teach others than to pride himself upon his learning; affectionate to his friends and family; zealous for his country and his country's language. The famous phrase in the *Toxophilus* about "writing this English matter in the English speech for Englishmen," is no mere figure of rhetoric or bit of jingle, but a sentence to which the author adheres as far as possible throughout his work, all the really important constituents of which, the *Toxophilus*, the *Schoolmaster*, and the *Letters*, have already been named.

Ascham.

Each of the three has its separate interest in the history of English prose, and the three together give their author a very important place in that history. The *Letters*, as is natural, rank lowest, yet very far from low. In the first place, when we compare them with the Paston collection,[1] the only really considerable body of English epistolary correspondence earlier, we find—not merely or mainly as a consequence of the fact that we are dealing with a professed scholar instead of with a family group of men and women of the upper rank indeed, and of fair education,

His *Letters*.

[1] This famous and interesting series, first published by Sir John Fenn a century ago, and definitively edited in three vols. by Mr. Gairdner, has in literature rather less importance than it possesses in political and social history. In fact it may be said to lack the one kind exactly because it possesses the other, consisting of simple straightforward communications of fact and business from entirely unliterary persons.

but of no special bent towards literature—a very distinct advance in command over the language for miscellaneous purposes. But we also find something more. At first the letters, even the familiar letters, even those to ladies and close personal friends, are written in Latin—the language which, as Ascham elsewhere candidly confesses, and as we can well understand from the general practice of the Renaissance, came much easier to him to write than English. But by degrees this changes. The same deliberate purpose which led him to write the *Toxophilus* in the mother tongue, assisted beyond all doubt by the same general unconscious "atmospheric" influence which was not peculiar to him, induces him by degrees to put his work, even of the most informal kind, in English, to write news of his German tour to his Cambridge friends in that language. He shows, in short, a sense of the fact—so slowly borne in upon English men of letters, even so much later and greater as Bacon and Hobbes—that English was not a mere makeshift, a mere engine of condescendence to children and grooms, but a vehicle of literature, not, indeed, perhaps quite so perfect (no man *circa* 1550 could be expected to admit that) as Latin or Greek, but capable of being immensely improved, and deserving of the pains necessary to improve it. But Ascham's chosen means of improvement, his aims, his ideal of English style naturally appear best in his more formal and ambitious treatises. It is very lucky that there is so long an interval between the composition of these, and that their subjects are so different. *Toxophilus* is the work of a man of thirty, devoted to what was at once his own favourite recreation, and still one of the main-stays of the national greatness. Of course there is a good deal in it which is very remotely connected with archery. The author would not have been a humanist, or even a human being, if he had not aired a good deal of his acquaintance with the new-found and certainly not too much prized Plato, if he had not allowed large scope to the passion for education which characterised all his literary generation, and himself very particularly. There are many more tolerable gaps in English literature than the loss of that *Book of the Cockpit*, with which, much later in life, he intended to accompany it. But even by itself *Toxophilus* gives us a happy picture of that blending of instruction with pastime, which, by one of the greatest of the many pieces of good luck which have distinguished English history, occupied the minds and ideas of the men who superintended the transition from monastic to lay studies in England, and carried out the views of Walter of Merton, and the two Williams of Wykeham and Wainfleet, in succeeding centuries, with a fortunate development.

Toxophilus.

The *Schoolmaster* is naturally more serious, yet not too serious. Something of the old largeness appears in the first book, dealing as

it does generally with the bringing-up of youth; nor does this disappear by any means wholly in the second, with its preciser subject.

The *Schoolmaster.*

On the ready way to the Latin tongue Ascham may go wrong; he does so go often, as in his polemic against romance, his fatal patronage of the pestilent heresy of imitating Greek and Latin prosody, not merely in feet but in metres, and other things. But in general he is an early and an eloquent defender and apostle of the true English education, in classics and in the vernacular for book-learning, in body-culture and healthy pastime as well as in book-learning itself.

And one at least of the errors just noticed was only a corruption of the best and central principle of his work in prose—the borrowing of all possible assistance from the classical tongues in the formation of a good English style. In doing this he stops rigidly short of classicising the vocabulary. Cheke does not dislike a mere Latinism, or Wilson an "ink-horn" term, more than Ascham does. Like both, and even more than both, he hates the modern foreign languages, and seems to be actuated by a positive and almost personal jealousy—not entirely groundless, when we remember how great the influence of French had been, how great that of Spanish and Italian was, and was to be, both in verse and prose—of their colouring and guiding. He retains, and even a little abuses, the specially English device of alliteration; and has a fancy which sometimes almost approaches the puerile, for arranging his sentences in strings or piles of half-parallel, half-antithetic clauses, after a fashion which we also find far back in the Middle English period. Indeed, some have even argued for a kind of "Euphuism before *Euphues*" in Ascham himself; and some seeds of it are no doubt, and necessarily, to be found in him. But, on the whole, his ideal of an English clause, an English sentence, an English paragraph is struck out on classical models—clear, not too long, but, on the other hand, not broken up into snip-snap, with no special rhetorical figure very apparent, and with the old poetical cadence and colouring carefully avoided, but sometimes fairly balanced, arranged not seldom with a weighty, yet lucid, sententiousness, and not very seldom rising with some cunning to a climax which permits the rounding off of the paragraph with real rhetorical effect. Ascham's is, in short, the first accomplished plain style in English—the first, that is to say, that, while deliberately aiming at a certain amount of rhetorical effect, rigidly eschews the production of that effect by any such means as elaborate, highly-coloured, or quaint vocabulary, by unusual and invented tricks of arrangement, or by anything that can come under the phrases (often loosely used, but intelligible) of ornate, poetical, or impassioned prose.

Their characteristics.

The classical turn communicated to English prose by this knot of scholars more particularly, and encouraged by others from both Universities, was yet further promoted by the continuing habit of translating from the classics, and from modern writers in Latin. The authors of these translations, except in a few cases, mostly later than the present time, such as those of North and Florio (which had great direct influence on English prose, and were themselves notable examples of it) hardly fall to be noticed here. But the influence of their practice is unmistakable. The great innovation of Euphuism (*vide infra*, chap. vi.) was rather an unconscious than a deliberate revolt against it; the carrying out of the system produced in Hooker perhaps the most accomplished writer of strict prose (as distinguished from the half-poetical vehicle of Malory and Berners) that appeared in English up to the end of the sixteenth century; and even the great authors of the first half of the seventeenth were deeply influenced by the tradition of classicising.[1]

[1] To this period belong the later Tudor chroniclers, the chief of whom is Holinshed (1525-1578), a Cheshire man, it is said, by birth, and a Cambridge man by education, certainly one of those printer's hacks, or gentlemen of the press, to whom literature has owed something. Holinshed's close connection with the matter of Shakespeare, the divulgation of large passages of him by Shakespeare's commentators, and perhaps the fact that his Christian name was Raphael, have conciliated to him an almost disproportionate amount of esteem. But though he has no extraordinarily literary qualities, the "race" and the archaic fashions of his manner are irresistibly pleasant to us.

CHAPTER III

PRELIMINARIES—VERSE

The state of poetry *c.* 1530—Good effect of Italian—Wyatt's life—Surrey's—Wyatt's forms and subjects—Those of Surrey—The main characteristics of the pair—Wyatt's rhyme and rhythm—Surrey's metrical advance—*Tottel's Miscellany*—Other miscellanies—Verse translations—Churchyard—Whetstone—Tusser—Turberville—Googe—Gascoigne—His *Instructions*—His poems—The *Mirror for Magistrates*—Sackville's part in it.

THE same character of transition and introduction which appears in the prose and the drama of the latest years of Henry VIII., of the short reigns of his son and elder daughter, and of at least the first half of the long one of his younger, appears likewise in the department of poetry proper. Nay, it is perhaps even more remarkable there, for reasons easily obvious to any one who has read the preceding Books and chapters with care. Up to 1580, at or about which year the History of Elizabethan Literature, in the great sense, begins, drama was, and had been from its very origin, merely though steadily in the making; it had never reached any form that could be called artistically complete. Prose, with some examples far more absolutely excellent than any that drama could show, and with a much quicker and steadier progress, was in the making too; and had never reached perfection, save in partial and peculiar instances and forms. But poetry had, as we have seen, gone through curious successions of *maxima* and *minima*. After it had assimilated the great blend of language and prosody fashioned during the earlier part of the Middle English period, it produced in Chaucer a poet of the first class, who stood in a sense, though not in all senses, practically alone. It made a curious relapse from metrical upon alliterative prosody, and had produced good work in that. It had seen the singular outburst of Scottish Chaucerian poetry. It had provided a sort of underground growth of ballad. But in England itself it had, after Chaucer, fallen off, as far as the production of literary poetry of great merit went, in a manner which has still rather to be accepted than accounted for;

The state of poetry *c.* 1530.

and the inability of the poets to sing had driven them to endless and strange varieties of squeak and drone.

However Ascham and his fellows might dislike and dread and denounce Italian influence, there is no doubt that the way of safety was first opened to English poetry in these its straits by Italy. The sonnet—not alone, but chiefly—was the means of inducing English poets to gird up their loins, to settle the poetical accentuation of their language, to discard doggerel for regular metre, to arrange a poetic diction which should be neither stiff with the "aureate" verbiage of the rhetoricians, nor clownish with the vernacular of the doggerellists. Perhaps mere accident, perhaps the political and ecclesiastical stress of the years between the Reformation and the accession of Elizabeth, may account for the interval which elapsed between the composition and the publication of the chief documents exhibiting this new influence. But there is no explanation, except a purely fatalist one, for the fact that fully twenty years more elapsed between the actual publication and the following of the example to any good effect.

Good effect of Italian.

If there has ever been any mistake about the order of the two poets who heralded modern English poetry, it must have been a very strange one, the dates and facts about Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, by courtesy, Earl of Surrey, being altogether too clear and (despite their occasional uncertainty) too relatively certain to excuse the slightest confusion. Both were short-lived; and so it happened, not merely that Wyatt was considerably the elder, but that he died when Surrey was still quite a young man. The father of Wyatt, Sir Henry, was a person of distinction in Kent (sometimes called a baronet, though of course not in the modern sense of the word), and the poet was born at Allington Castle in that county, in the year 1503.

Wyatt's life.

He was sent to St. John's College, Cambridge, at the preposterously early age which was one of the crotchets of the Renaissance, entering at twelve, taking his Bachelor's degree at fifteen, and his Master's at seventeen. He seems to have married very early too, was a gentleman of the King's bedchamber, a friend of Anne Boleyn, and knighted in 1537. He had his share of the imprisonments which were the lot of Henry's courtiers, and perhaps, if he had lived, might have shared Surrey's fate. But he did a good deal of diplomatic work as ambassador in Spain and in the Netherlands, and died, being undoubtedly removed from the evil to come, in 1542, on his way to Falmouth, where he had a mission to meet the Spanish Ambassador and convoy him to London.

Surrey's birth-date is not known, but it is guessed at 1517 or 1518, probably in the spring of the latter year. He was grandson

of the victor of Flodden, and his mother was Lady Elizabeth Stafford, daughter of that Duke of Buckingham who fell a victim to Wolsey's jealousy. He was thus of almost the noblest blood in England, and at fourteen he was nominally wedded to Lady Frances de Vere, of a strain nobler still. They came together in 1535, Surrey meanwhile having been a sort of companion to the King's illegitimate son, the Duke of Richmond. He seems to have been rather a lively youth and young man, and got into frequent minor difficulties with the law. But nothing at all serious is brought against him; and his lamentable fate when he was barely thirty was due simply to the delirium of jealousy and blood-thirstiness which came upon Henry in his last days, and which, if he had lived a little longer, would have finished the English nobility. A ridiculous charge of high treason was brought against Surrey, and supported by more ridiculous charges of quartering the royal arms. He was condemned and beheaded in January 1547, nine days before Henry himself went to his own place.

Surrey's.

There is no certainty at all as to the order of the work either of Wyatt or of Surrey, though certain poems of both date themselves fairly by reference to known events. This matters the less, however, in the case of men whose lives, as has been seen, were short, who represent very clearly results of the same influences, and who, as not merely from probability, but from Surrey's lines on Wyatt's death, we know, stood to each other half in the relation of master and pupil, half in that of fellow-pupils in the same foreign and chiefly Italian school. It will be well first to give a brief account of the actual work of each, and then to make some remarks on their common or peculiar characteristics.

It is not for nothing that a sonnet stands in the forefront of the collection—haphazard as that collection, no doubt, is—of Wyatt's poems. For, various and remarkable as are the points of novelty in the work of the pair, the introduction and practice of the sonnet forms perhaps the most remarkable of these. And for some time the sonnets (with characteristics to be noted presently) continue—to give way at last to other (almost entirely love) poems in rhyme-royal, in octosyllabic couplets and quatrains, in a shortened rhyme-royal with an octosyllabic instead of a decasyllabic base, and in some fanciful stanzas, the base of which, following Skelton, though in more orderly fashion, goes as low as six syllables. A five-line stanza of heroics appears, and also eights and sixes, which may have been originally intended either for that form or as fourteeners with middle rhyme. Moreover, there appears also a curious form, which was very much favoured by all the poets of the mid sixteenth century, though the objections to it are great, the

Wyatt's forms and subjects.

alternate Alexandrine and fourteener rhymed in couplets. There are also rondeaux and other lyrical forms, though few and cautiously attempted ; and last of all we find certain epistles of a satirical kind and certain translations of the Psalms, couched in heroic quatrains arranged with curiously interlaced rhymes, as well as sometimes in definite *terza* and *ottava rima.*

The forms and contents of Surrey's poems, with one notable exception, are not very different from those of his master—sonnet, quatrains, interlaced heroic-couplets, the jog-trot fourteener and Alexandrine, in which he even translates Ecclesiastes and the Psalms. The subject is mostly love, and satire is absent. But the added item, which is of the very first importance, is a translation of the second *Aeneid* in blank verse, of which there are no known earlier examples in English, though, as has been noted in its place, there are signs of something like it in Chaucer's prose *Tale of Melibee.* We can only guess how the idea came to Surrey or to some other unknown person, if (which there is no reason to suppose) he borrowed it. Although there is no blank verse in French up to this date (or indeed, except as a curiosity, since), rhymeless verses were attempted a little earlier than Surrey's date in Italian. It is, of course, very likely that these gave Surrey, as they gave the Spaniards, the hint ; but it is not quite impossible that this hint was not needed. It was a common and natural effect of the worship of the classics to look down on rhyme as a barbarous thing ; and it was not a very extraordinary audacity for a man, translating what was then thought the chief poetic achievement of antiquity, to resolve to imitate Virgil directly in not using this savage gaud. Nor, when alliteration had long been borrowing rhyme and stanza from metre, would it be unnatural for metre to borrow rhymelessness from alliteration. Nor is it absolutely impossible that Surrey would have gone the entire length of the next generation and have attempted not merely unrhymed English verse, but unrhymed English hexameters, if the language had been sufficiently under his command. It was lucky that it was not ; for though it is impossible, as every fresh attempt shows, that the hexameter can ever rank in English as anything but a rather awkward *tour de force*, we might have had some trouble in getting rid of it, whereas in blank verse decasyllables Surrey at once endowed the language with its most natural, though latest won, and for certain purposes most effective, variety of verse.

Those of Surrey.

"If the language had been more under his command," it has been said ; and the words will aptly introduce one of the two chief points for notice in the poetry of Wyatt and Surrey. It has been repeatedly indicated in the last Book that either one cause or one

concomitant of the weakness of fifteenth-century poetry in England was that the poets more and more lost this control of language. The reasons are not positively known, and cannot be dogmatically laid down; they have little or nothing to do with individual genius, though it certainly would appear that Chaucer's English is in a state of premature and forced perfection to which his successors could not attain, and which, before any fit heir appeared, had become archaic. It would appear likewise that the completion of the constitution of English proper, the final severance from the Continent, and the changes of which the disappearance of the final uttered *e* is the most remarkable, had brought about, or had at least been followed by, some not clearly intelligible change in the whole tonality and vocalisation of the tongue. The new pronounced English was not adjustable to Chaucerian prosody, and it did not find what it wanted in alliterative verse. The results were that extraordinary stumbling and plunging, that driving of the chariot as if with locked wheels, which we have noted in Lydgate, in Occleve, and even in Hawes, and from which Skelton only escaped (when he did escape) by a series of clumsy gambades in doggerel. Yet this doggerel did good by teaching the language at least to move with some flexibility, if with little elegance, and now came Wyatt and Surrey with the severe *manège* of the sonnet and the rest to get it into something like graceful movement in regular form.

The main characteristics of the pair.

What hard work they had to do, and to what extent they were still beaten by the antinomianism of the language in its state of flux, will best be shown by printing Wyatt's first sonnet (which is by no means a specially terrible example), with foot-divisions and a few quantifying accents: —

Wyatt's rhyme and rhythm.

The long | love that | in my | thought I | harbèr
And in | my heart | doth keep | his re | sidence,
Into | my face | presseth | with bold | pretence,
And there | campèth | display | ing his | bannèr:
She that | me learns | to love | and to | suffèr,
And wills | that my | trust and | lust's[1] neg | ligence
Be rein | ed by rea | son, shame, | and rev | erence,
With his | hardì | ness tak | ès dis | pleasùre,
Wherewith | love to | the hart's[1] fo | rest he | fleèth,
Leaving | his en | terprise | with pain | and cry,
And there | him hi | deth and | not àp | pearèth.
What may | I do? | when my | master | fearèth,
But in | the field | with him | to live | and die,
For good | is thè | life | end | ing faithfully.

[1] Printed in Tottel "luste's" and "harte's," but I do not think any metrical value was meant to be given to the *e*.

There are several things to be observed in this—the way in which the advantage, if not necessity, of a final couplet forced itself on these very earliest practitioners of the English sonnet, the remnant of the allegorical personification of the fifteenth century, and others. But the chief of all is the nervousness and uncertainty of the quantification and rhyme. We have already left the sheer verse-prose of Lydgate and Occleve at their worst, as well as the mere doggerel of Skelton at his best. But the poet still hobbles, at times painfully. In one line, as we see above, he is driven to make "takes" a dissyllable, and to put an entirely non-natural quantification upon "hardiness," and "displeasure," which should simply change places in a nonsense verse. More surprising perhaps—for this liberty of stress is frequent in Chaucer, and continues to Spenser and even to Shakespeare—is the mistiness which seems to beset him in the matter of rhyme. It is clear that the first, third, and fourth rhymes of the sestet are on the *ėth* only, yet he cannot resist the double rhyme "feareth" and "appeareth," though it not merely conflicts with the single rhyme of "fleeth," but itself introduces a quite false rhythm into the lines, making them in effect feminine-rhymed nine-syllable lines, and not decasyllables at all.

But these stumbles were inevitable in picking the way up the steep and stony path from the abysses to which English poetry had descended, and the very stumbles themselves are gain, inasmuch as they warn the stumbler to pick his way more carefully next time. Wyatt has the plain, straight (and also strait) ways of the sonnet and his other forms to guide him; he has the enormous advantage of fresh models, different from the thousand-times-borrowed ones of a century and more past; and above all, he has the gift of poetic phrase, which we meet again in him after many days.

Into a bitter fashion of forsaking

is perhaps better than any single line in southern English since Chaucer; and when we meet with such single spies we know that they will come in battalions soon.

Wyatt found an apt pupil in Surrey, and there is, in fact, more progress between these two almost contemporary writers than we find after them in the more than thirty years between Surrey's death and the *Shepherd's Calendar*. Henry Howard perceived the absolute necessity of accepting a certain rhythmical standard for a word, and not varying its values and balance entirely at the pleasure, or rather the need, of the poet. There is even in him a rudimentary discovery, or rediscovery, of a matter of still greater importance, the power which an English poet possesses of varying the harmony and composition of his line by

Surrey's metrical advance.

shifting the place of the pause. Neither he nor Wyatt, indeed, has arrived at the final secret, the license of trisyllabic substitution; the most they can do in this way is a clumsy elision of the vowel in article and preposition. But it was just as well that too many liberties should not be taken at once, and that the decasyllable as such should be reformed into melody before it was expanded by license into an hendecasyllable, a dodecasyllable, or even more. For the temptations of doggerel were still about, and were only too much indulged in the eights and sixes and in the "poulter's measure,"[1] the compound of Alexandrine and fourteener just noticed. If any one had at this time indulged himself in the license of the dramatic or Tennysonian tribrachs, the result must pretty certainly have been chaos, and the language would never have had its period of discipline at all. As it was, there is reason still to marvel at the change which—no doubt half, if not all, unconsciously—these two "persons of quality"—one a busy diplomatist, the other a careless man, or rather youth, of pleasure—achieved. It may be that neither Wyatt nor Surrey has left any perfect poem, that nothing of either's is as sheer poetry equal to the best work of Sackville; but their gain in form is almost incalculable.

Tottel's Miscellany.

The circumstances of the publication of the poems of the two were peculiar. It had become the habit of printers and working men of letters to make and issue, with or without permission, "miscellanies" of poetical pieces, sometimes attributed to their authors, sometimes not, and sometimes again (as was sure to happen) attributed wrongly. In the middle of the seventeenth century especially this joint custom of MS. collection and miscellany publication led to a great deal of confusion. To this day some of the most famous pieces of English verse—Jonson's "Sidney's Sister," Bishop King's "Like to the falling of a Star," and others—are in a state of contested, if not exactly dubious, title between two or more claimants, while in the same or other cases the genuine text is very much a matter of guesswork. The publication of the chief works of Surrey and Wyatt with pieces by other persons of distinction at Henry VIII.'s court—the unlucky Lord Rochford, Lord Vaux, Wyatt's friend Sir Francis Bryan, and others—was due to the printer Richard Tottel, and to a Huntingdonshire scholar, Nicholas Grimald, who has been thought to be an Italian and a Grimaldi. This is by no means necessary, for different forms of the name, ranging from Grimoald to Grimwald, are found in different countries and tongues during the Middle Ages. Grimald, who was a

[1] Said to be (cf. our "baker's dozen") so called from the habit of poulterers giving twelve eggs to one customer and fourteen to another, according to fear or favour; see Gascoigne (p. 39, ed. Arber), who seems to have invented the name.

member of both Universities, lecturer at Christ Church, chaplain to Ridley, etc., was born in 1519, and was therefore very little younger than Surrey, whom, as well as other authors of the famous *Tottel's Miscellany*, he may have known. But the book itself[1] did not appear till 1557, eleven years after Surrey's death and fifteen after Wyatt's. The editor contributed (at least in the first edition, for he left most of them out in the second) no small number of pieces of his own, and there was in both a considerable contingent from "uncertain authors." Few of the uncertainties, or of the works of the minor lights mentioned above, are of great value; and Grimald himself generally writes stuff which is only distinguished from the average work of the previous generation by being invariably serious in form, and by showing a metrical regularity which, if only singsong and uninspired, is at any rate strictly observed. This is what is meant by the printer's apology for "the stateliness of style removed from the rude skill of common ears"—for "style" was then generally, and here clearly, used as including "metre," and the context plainly shows that the contrast Tottel was thinking of was with doggerel and ballad measures. And he was quite right. It is true that for a very long time Wyatt and Surrey have held their proper place in general literary history and criticism; but there have been occasional attempts, if not exactly to degrade them from it, to glance at them as mere reformers of form. The retort is, of course, quite obvious, and entirely fatal to the sneer. It was reform of form that was wanted, for the simple reason that for a century and a half form of any meritorious kind had practically ceased to exist. At first the "stateliness of style" may have been all too near to stiffness, and no one with absolute inspiration may have been ready to take the prepared instrument. But the instrument was at last prepared.

The poetical work of the period, before the appearance of the *Shepherd's Calendar* and after *Tottel's Miscellany*, divides itself naturally under three heads: 1. Subsequent miscellanies; 2. Individual poets or translators of minor rank; 3. Sackville. An extreme purist might urge that the three, or at any rate the first and the third, are one. For Sackville's poetical work, which stands in such startling contrast to the wooden verse of *Gorboduc*, appeared in what was practically a miscellany, the *Mirror for Magistrates*. But it will be better and clearer to divide the subject in the order above named, and not to mention the *Mirror* till we come to Sackville himself. The two first heads will not delay us long.

It is somewhat curious that *Tottel's Miscellany*, the popularity of which we know from the rapidity with which the second edition

[1] Ed. Arber.

followed the first (itself reprinted in six weeks or so), with fresh issues in 1559, 1565, and 1574, as well as others later, and from the imitations of it, waited some time for these imitations. Few things indeed are more significant than the long "waits" between the writing and the publication of the poems contained in it, and the still longer ones before any dared to emulate it, when we contrast them with the rush and huddle of new and ever new poetry in the last half of the Queen's reign.

Other miscellanies.

The first actual successor[1] was published nearly twenty years after Tottel, in 1576, and its name, *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, followed as it was by others, showed the influence of Euphuism, the period of Lyly, as compared with the sober *Songs and Sonnets* of the earlier book when Ascham had represented English prose. It was the work of a man then dead, the dramatist and musician Richard Edwards. It contains a mixture of work of the former and the then present generation, Lord Vaux figuring beside Lord Oxford, the courtier of the old King's time by the courtier of the still fairly young Queen. Kinwelmersh, Hunnis, and other respectable men of letters of Elizabeth's day also make show, and there is one piece the initials of which (not given in the first edition) may be Walter Raleigh's. The book, though very popular (it was reprinted once a year for three years, and repeatedly afterwards), was not much of a *Paradise*, nor its devices very dainty. But they were, as their pretty if affected title might seem to warrant, better than those of the absurdly named and dully filled *Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* which followed two years later, and seems to have been collected and partly written by Owen Roydon and T. P. (Thomas Proctor). The mania for alliteration which beset the writers of this time so strongly was particularly strong in T. P., who, outdoing even Churchyard (*vide infra*), distinguished himself by printing a production proclaimed to be "Pretty Pamphlets by Proctor." The willow song—

> Willow, willow, willow, sing all of green willow—

appears here. *England's Helicon* and the *Poetical Rhapsody* are infinitely better, but they come after Spenser.

[1] All the more important of these miscellanies up to the Queen's death were reprinted together by Collier in 1867; but the issue was private and very small, and the book hardly ever occurs in catalogues. Mr. Arber, besides *Tottel*, has given (in his "English Scholar's Library") Robinson's *Handful of Delights;* Mr. Bullen *England's Helicon*, and Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody*. Park's *Heliconia* (3 vols. 1815) contains, besides the *Handful*, the *Gorgeous Gallery*, the *Phoenix Nest*, and the large and interesting anthology, rather than miscellany, of *England's Parnassus*.

Next to the miscellanies, the verse translations make a great figure in the poetical production of this time, though again it cannot be said that they attain to high poetical merit. In any case, no doubt, the popularity of the classics would have brought them about; but the action of Surrey, whose authority was so great in other ways, made them certain. The translators,[1] however, were by no means bold enough to follow his example of blank verse as a matter of course. They preferred as a rule the too often clumsy fourteener, which, just as it was much later going out of fashion, gave us the splendid Homeric paraphrase of Chapman. There was little splendour about the earlier examples, but the first of them had great influence in other ways, being a version of Seneca's *Troades* by Jasper Heywood, son of John, Fellow first of Merton and then of All Souls, and in Elizabeth's time a Jesuit. This play was issued as early as 1559, two years only after *Tottel's Miscellany*, and by the same printer. He followed it up with two others, the *Thyestes* and *Hercules Furens*, and the example being caught at, the whole ten Senecan plays were issued together in 1581. Rhyme-royal, the quatrain, and other stanzas are used for the chorus; but the ambling fourteener serves as the staple.

Verse translations.

This was also the metre of Phaer's *Virgil*, which appeared, as far as the first seven books went, the year after Tottel, and was finished partly by the author, partly after his death in 1560 by another hand. Phaer was a Pembrokeshire man, a member of the University of Oxford, a lawyer, and a doctor. There is merit in his version (which shows a consciousness of trisyllabic substitution and its advantages), as there is also in the companion *Ovid* of Arthur Golding, a man of property and good connections, who was born about the middle of the fifth decade of the century, and lived till its close. He did prose as well as verse translations; but the *Metamorphoses* was his chief book, and this appeared in 1567, again in fourteeners. The verse translators cannot indeed boast, as the prose can, that they had a distinct and important influence on the development of style in their own sphere, but the two helped in the practice, the exercise, which was the business and the benefit of this particular time.

The individual authors of the period other than Sackville partake of that character of curiosity which distinguishes the whole of it, and which repels some tastes as much as it conciliates others. The chief names are Churchyard, Whetstone, Tusser, Turberville, Googe, and,

[1] They have not had quite their share of the otherwise indiscriminate devotion of reprinters, Stanyhurst's rather later and extremely mad *Aeneid* having almost alone the honour to be recently given (in Mr. Arber's "English Scholar's Library." Golding's *Ovid* has a stately reprint). The translators of Seneca besides Heywood were Neville, Studley, Nuce, and Newton.

above all, George Gascoigne, the type, and at the same time the most eminent, of the whole. It is almost enough to say, on the one hand, that to no single one of the six is ascribed even the smallest piece of verse which has made its way into the memory of the general. On the other hand, all have importance to the historian, and Gascoigne is, as has been said, very decidedly the typical man of letters of the first half of the great Queen's reign.

Churchyard.

Thomas Churchyard, first born and last to die of all the group, was a Shropshire man, born at Shrewsbury about 1520, and so not much younger than Surrey, a juxtaposition which makes all the more striking the fact that he did not die till the first year of James I. It would appear that he took the portion of goods that belonged to him and went to court early enough to become "servant" to Surrey, in those conditions of honourable and gentle service and education which flourished for some time to come. The connection was continued long after his chief's death by his contributions to *Tottel's Miscellany*. But long before the appearance of that book Churchyard had seen other and hotter service in the Netherlands (1542) and Scotland (1545), had been taken prisoner in a second Scotch campaign (1548), had travelled, had served in Ireland (1550), in Lorraine, in the Netherlands again, at Calais, or at least Guines, just at the period of its loss. He had begun a long series of mostly petty individual contributions to literature when he was about thirty; but his historical importance begins with his contribution to Tottel in 1557, and to the *Mirror for Magistrates* (see below) in 1558-59. After several more years of fighting and writing he collected his work, or some of it, under the alliterative and exact title of *Churchyard's Chips*, modestly accounting in prose for the selection of the same. Fighting he continued till the siege of Zutphen in 1572, just thirty years after he had first taken arms; writing he never left off till the close of his long life, the later part of which was spent in court service. So late as 1604 his *Good Will*, a poem on the death of Archbishop Whitgift, preserved, in a manner which must have seemed odd enough to the hearers of Donne and the survivors of Spenser, the lolloping verse, the curious antithetic alliteration, the wooden scheme of the poets of this later transition. Churchyard has been affectionately taken up, more than once, by men of letters as a curiosity; and it must be admitted that worse writers than he have had the honour of complete editions, which he has lacked.[1]

In George Whetstone, whose date of birth and death are both

[1] *Heliconia* contains some things of his—including the Whitgift piece, and Collier reprinted (in a very few copies) the *Chips*. But this is little for a man whose bibliography fills nearly ten columns in Hazlitt's *Handbook*.

unknown, we have another example of the type so common at this time, and of the characteristics of alliteration, of a sort of survival of allegory, and of a kind of composition which, though advanced beyond the mere rudiments, is still stiff and wooden. The earliest dated thing that we have of his is the *Rock of Regard*, 1576, a miscellany mostly in verse; the latest is supposed to date from 1587, and is a pamphlet on the execution of Queen Mary "and other notable traitors." The only things of Whetstone's at all generally known are his play of *Promos and Cassandra* (a dull thing, but in *Dodsley*) and his *Remembrance* of George Gascoigne, which has commonly,[1] though not always, accompanied reprints of that poet. He was rather fond of these poetical obituaries or remembrances,[2] of which about half a dozen are known; and he also wrote prose tales, chiefly collected in a *Heptameron* (the title, of course, suggested by Margaret of Navarre) *of Civill Dyscourses*. These prose tales, indeed, which played so important a part in the furnishing of subjects to the dramatists, were almost as much a feature of the time as the poetical miscellanies and verse translations. The largest and best known is William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (alliterative again), which appeared in 1566-67.[3]

Whetstone.

Of the two T's, Tusser and Turberville, the former is not a poet at all, but a verse-curiosity. He is our only, or almost our only, English Georgic poet, and his poetry frankly acquiesces in doggerel. His life, which seems to have dated from about 1515 to 1580, began in Essex, was passed at St. Paul's and Eton (where Udall, as previously observed, beat him much), at Cambridge, at court, and lastly on a farm in Sussex, where he cultivated and rhymed. His *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*,[4] published in 1573, consists of quatrains in rolling anapæstic tetrameters besides interludes and oddments in other metres.

Tusser.

George Turberville, on the other hand, was a poet—certainly the best poet of the time (always excepting Sackville) next to Gascoigne, and perhaps Gascoigne's equal. He was a Dorsetshire man, who must have been born about 1530, and was not dead ten years before the end of the reign, who went to Winchester and New College, did some diplomatic work in Russia, and seems to have been of independent fortune. Like most of his contemporaries,

Turberville.

[1] As, for instance, in Chalmers's *Poets*, vol. ii., and in Mr. Arber's Reprint of the *Steel Glass*.

[2] *Heliconia*, vol. ii. contains one on the Earl of Bedford.

[3] This huge compilation from the chief French and Italian novel collections has had the honour of two reprints, one in 1813 by Haslewood, and one in 1890 by Mr. Joseph Jacobs.

[4] It had appeared as "One Hundred" only in the year of Tottel. Being full of folk-lore and other extra-literary interest, it has been several times reprinted.

he was specially addicted to translation in prose and verse from ancients and moderns. But in 1570 he produced a volume of *Epitaphs, Epigrams, Songs, and Sonnets.*[1] Turberville has not much power of continued poetical flight, but there is in some of his lyrics a genuine and unforced sweetness which is extremely agreeable, and at this time very rare.

Googe.

His friend Barnabe Googe,[2] who is thought to have been born about 1540, and who died in 1594, cannot be complimented on much lyrical gift; but some Eclogues of his have importance, and in his *Cupid Conquered* he has some of the appeal of a predecessor—though afar off—of Spenser. He came from Lincolnshire, and was a son both of Oxford and Cambridge, a client of Burleigh's, and a particularly active and miscellaneous translator, of extreme Protestant tendencies in his selection of books to translate. The most obvious oddity of Googe's original poems, the extraordinary fashion in which the lines are divided—for instance, decasyllables being split up into fours and sixes, and Alexandrines into quarters—is thought to have been due to the mere mechanical shiftlessness of the printer, who had a small page and large type. Googe, when he is not simply flat, often sins by the use of the bombastic and fustianish style, which was common, and at which Shakespeare laughs with such merciless good-nature.

Gascoigne.

Among these shadows and others more shadowy still—the very "Henry Pimpernel and old John Naps of Greece" in English literature—George Gascoigne gives us at least something like a substantive figure.[3] His life, though not so long as Churchyard's, was nearly as typical, and his work was much better. Like most of the men with whom he is here associated, but even more than most of them, Gascoigne was a person of birth, breeding, and education. He was the son of a Bedfordshire knight, Sir John Gascoigne, and was connected on his mother's side with Frobisher the seaman. He was a Cambridge man, his college being Trinity, and, like most University men perhaps for some three centuries, finished his education at the Inns of Court—in his case, Gray's Inn and the Temple. He was born about 1537, and can have been hardly of age when he entered Parliament, sitting for

[1] Reprinted in Chalmers, vol. ii.

[2] See Mr. Arber's *Reprints*. Of Googe's translations, the *Popish Kingdom* (from the *Regnum Papisticum* of Naogeorgus or Kirchmeyer) had the honour of an extremely handsome black-letter reprint in 1880, the editor being Mr. R. C. Hope. It is in fluent and freely alliterated fourteeners, but its literary interest is very small.

[3] Poems in Chalmers, vol. ii., and more completely by W. C. Hazlitt; the *Steel Glass*, the *Complaint of Philomene*, and the *Notes* in Arber's *Reprints*. There is a good study of Gascoigne by Dr. Schelling of Philadelphia.

Bedford in 1557. He must have begun to write verse very early, but printed nothing for some years. His translated or adapted tragedy and comedy already referred to (p. 231) were acted in Gray's Inn Hall in 1566. He married in 1567, served in the Netherlands in 1572, and onwards to 1574, and in the first of these years published, or had published for him (there was often a little innocent make-believe about these things in those days), a collection of poems styled *A Hundred Sundry Flowers*, which in the later issue of 1575 was divided into *Flowers, Herbs, and Weeds*. He had to do with the Kenilworth Revels in 1575, and next year published his *Steel Glass*, a regular satire of considerable length in blank verse. He died in October 1577. Besides the works already mentioned, Gascoigne is noted for the first translated prose tale from Bandello (a style so much followed by Painter and others), and for his very important *Certain Notes or Instructions concerning the Making of Verse or Rhyme in English*.

His *Instructions*.

These *Instructions*, being criticism not creation, escape the drawbacks of the other work in regard to intrinsic merit, and hold a secure position, comparable in English, though, of course, with great abatement of scale and genius, to that held by Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquio* in Italian. They are very short; and although Gascoigne had a long past of English behind him, it will readily be apprehended by intelligent readers of the foregoing pages that his actual knowledge of English poetry was not great. The study of Anglo-Saxon was indeed reviving in his time, but it did not affect ordinary men of letters for many generations to come. Nor do Gascoigne or his contemporaries and followers seem to have been acquainted with any Middle English writers before Chaucer, though *Piers Plowman* was not an unknown book. Gascoigne himself only glances at alliterative metre in the terms of Chaucer's own scoff at it, does not mention a single poet by name except Chaucer himself, and as his followers, the later Elizabethan critics (see chap. vi.), also did, though still more decidedly, confines himself mainly to a rhetorical abstract of the Art of Poetry, dwelling successively on the necessity of fresh invention and the avoidance of commonplaces, on the importance of "keeping the measure," and not (for instance) slipping from poulter's measure—Alexandrines and fourteeners—to fourteeners by themselves; on quantity, accent, and metre generally; on the disadvantage of polysyllables, and the impropriety of coining words for rhyme's sake; on the danger (a caution very specially needed, as we have seen) of excessive alliteration and of inusitate word-inversion; on the pause; on rhyme-royal and other stanza forms; and on "riding rhyme" (the heroic couplet). The most really noticeable thing about the whole is Gascoigne's

assumption (all the more important because he is evidently not satisfied with it) that the decasyllable must be confined to strict iambics and (with an easement, it is true, as to rhyme-royal) to the middle pause. We have seen how this undue, but for the time salutary, restraint was arrived at; we shall see how it was removed.

Gascoigne's practice, as compared with that of his neighbours, certainly does not discredit the maxim that "every poet should contain a critic." Except Sackville, he is the best poet of the group, and he goes far beyond Sackville in the one point of variety. The blank verse of the *Steel Glass* is indeed marred by the at this time universal fault of *staccato* movement—the lines being far too often concluded within themselves in sense, and the monotony being increased by the poet's acceptance of the middle pause, and by his abuse of the practice of beginning successive lines with the same word.[1] Yet though not vivid, it is generally vigorous, and sometimes even incisive. The lyrics and stanza poems escape this drawback, and, though the author recks his own rede about excessive alliteration but ill, attain very commonly to prettiness and not seldom to pathos. The same mark of a certain childishness is still on the verse; but it very often has the grace as well as the immaturity of childhood.

His poems.

There is nothing childish about the few and noble verses of Thomas Sackville.[2] They were published in a curious book which, except in the pages contributed by Sackville himself, has very small literary, as compared with its historical, interest. The *Mirror for Magistrates* was planned in the reign of Queen Mary by William Baldwin, an Oxford man, a priest, a scholar, a schoolmaster, and a printer, who seems to have been born not long after the beginning of the century, and George Ferrers, a member of the same University, of Lincoln's Inn, and of Parliament, a writer on legal and historical subjects, as well as of interludes, who died in 1579. The book, which was intended to be a sort of supplement to Lydgate's version of Boccaccio's *Falls of Princes*, is said to have been printed in part as early as 1555, but was interfered with by Gardiner and did not attain license for publica-

The *Mirror for Magistrates.*

[1] It is of the first interest to notice how this practice, which is so effective for good in the mobile-centred and complex-footed verse of Tennyson, aggravates the monotony of strict decasyllables with the immovable middle pause.

[2] Sackville's drama has been already dealt with. His life only touched literature in those two early passages of it. He was born (his father, Sir Richard Sackville, was Chancellor of the Exchequer) about 1536, at Buckhurst, and is supposed to have been a member of Hart Hall, St. John's College, Oxford, and of the Inner Temple. He was made Lord Buckhurst in 1567, K.G. in 1589, Lord Treasurer in 1599, and Earl of Dorset in 1604. He died at the Council table four years later.

tion till 1559. It contained nineteen "tragedies" by Baldwin, Ferrers, and Phaer (?), Sackville not being yet a contributor. His two pieces, the *Induction* (not to the general work but to such "tragedies" as he might write) and the *Complaint of Buckingham*, appeared in the second and enlarged edition of 1563, to which Churchyard also contributed. To complete the general story of the book, in 1574 John Higgins issued a fresh batch, taken from earlier times between Brutus and Caesar, and four years later Thomas Blennerhassett added pieces dealing with the first thousand years of the Christian era. Baldwin's and Higgins's, but not Blennerhassett's, parts were united, (still with new matter) in 1587, and at last, in 1610, the whole, again with additions, came together. Consisting, as the book does, entirely of tragical stories from English history, and covering, as its various issues do, almost the whole period during which, as we shall see, verse-history was a specially favourite form, it cannot lack a certain interest. But its merit as poetry is almost entirely confined to Sackville's contributions.[1]

Sackville's part in it.

They are short enough. *The Induction* and *The Complaint of Henry, Duke of Buckingham* (Richard III.'s victim, not Wolsey's) occupy between them less than 200 stanzas in rhyme-royal, or rather more than 1300 lines. The language, as comports with the metre and with the design of the book to supply a sort of sequel to Lydgate, is a little archaic. There is even an attempt, doubtless also deliberate, to keep up fifteenth-century style both in personifying allegory and in a sort of modified "rhetoric." But hardly a single stanza, certainly no single page, can be read by a poetically-minded reader without his being well aware that an entirely new music is sounding in his ears, a music of which perhaps a faint, far-off anticipation may be discovered in the "Cressid" stanzas of Henryson already so highly praised, but which is now fully organised in diapason. This is by no means due merely, though it is in part, to the fact that the writer has entirely shaken off the metrical palsy of the fifteenth century itself, and has, moreover, emerged from the swaddling-clothes of the transition prosody. Even his archaism does not make Sackville stiff; even such uncomely survival-catchwords of poetic diction as "hugy" do not make him stale or flat. He has thoroughly saturated and informed his old stanza with the vigour and variety of the new line which the poets from Wyatt onwards had been gingerly and tentatively fingering at. He has not the slightest need of the clumsy stop-at-the-end with which they are wont to stay themselves like skaters in their noviciate, who bring themselves up by digging in a

[1] The athletic Haslewood grappled with the whole in his three-volume reprint (1815), but the adventure has not been re-attempted.

pointed stick for fear of slipping, and never dare strike out. It cannot be expected that he should have mastered (as indeed nobody did till Shakespeare) the crowning secret of English verse, the glorious liberty of the ubiquitous pause. But he already knows how to vary it, avails himself fully of the license as to the middle place granted even by Gascoigne to his metre, and rings the changes not merely upon it, but upon stopped and unstopped lines, with a master's audacity and sureness.

Nor is this all. His merely formal improvements no doubt help him to attain, but by no means wholly account for, the new music referred to above. It has been said that the fifteenth century itself was strongly impressed, more strongly than the Middle Ages themselves, with the terror of death—that

Timor mortis conturbat me

was more than a mere literary catchword with it. But this mere terror is here changed, in English verse for the first time, to that greater and nobler Renaissance melancholy, the sighs of which served as wind to blow the organ music that distinguishes the best European poetry generally, and the best English poetry in particular, from about 1550 or later for a hundred years onwards, and the last echoes of which die away in the poetic prose of Browne and the Pindaric verse of the better part of Cowley. The *Induction*, where Sorrow in person leads the poet to the infernal regions and shows him the doleful places; the *Complaint*, with its story of civil war and public treason and private treachery and royal ingratitude, lend themselves, of course, very well to the play to be played on this pipe, but it must be remembered that they equally well invite the mere doleful dulness which the poets of the fifteenth century too often permit themselves. Sackville is not quite so far from this in the *Complaint*, where the difficulty of telling actual historical details confronts him, as he is in the *Induction*, where poetry has free play; but he is far from it in both, and absolutely at the other pole in the first piece. Passages in it have been made familiar by many histories and anthologies, but the whole of its 500 lines or so ought to be known by every one who desires to acquaint himself with the full range of the powers of English poetry. Campbell, whose naturally excellent taste was still vitiated by eighteenth-century fallacies, could see little in it but gloom, though he admitted its poetry. The truth is that the poetry should make us forget the gloom, or rather remember it only as the vehicle, the occasion by which the poetry is exhibited. Sackville never lets mere "dismals" get the upper hand; it is always the poetry of the dismal that he keeps before us. And this is the

gift that we find before perhaps only in Chaucer, the gift of making the subject, whatever it is, quite subsidiary—a mere cup in which to present to us the wine of poetry, a mere canvas on which to display its colours and forms. The cup and the canvas are indeed necessary; we could not have the picture or the draught without them. But they are merely inseparable accidents: the property is the poetry.[1]

[1] *Note to Second Edition.*—If the poem on St. Mary Magdalene (published by the E. E. T. S. (ed. Sommer 1899), since the first edition of this history appeared and attributed to a certain Dr. Thomas Robinson, Dean of Durham) be rightly dated "before 1569," it belongs to the matter of this chapter. And if so it would deserve notice, not for its poetical merit, though it has some in the florid style which characterises late Elizabethan work, but because of its stanza, an octave consisting of seven decasyllables and an Alexandrine, rhymed *ababbccc*. As this not only anticipates Spenser in the Alexandrine termination but Giles Fletcher in the actual arrangement, it would be, if really of the above date, very remarkable indeed. But this attribution, and the evidence for fixing the date, are very far from certain, and the style of the poem suggests a period at least a quarter of a century later. It may be well to add in reference to the mere Alexandrine ending of a stanza that, as Guest pointed out (*English Rhythms*, p. 669, *note*), it may be found as far back as Sir Thomas More.

Note to Third Edition.—Since this note was written its suspicions have been confirmed by the cancelling of Dr. Sommer's attribution and the dating of the poem at "about 1621."

CHAPTER IV

SPENSER AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

The Leicester House circle—Sidney—His life—The sonnets—The *Defence of Poesy*—The *Arcadia*—Spenser—The "classical metre" craze—Other poets of Sidney's circle—Watson—Greville—Warner—The sonneteers of 1592-96—Constable—The satirists.

THE gossiping and personal side of literary history has always attracted rather excessive than insufficient attention. And it has naturally not been neglected in the endeavours to account for the sudden transformation, about the year 1579-80, of English literature from a rather dreary nursery ground, in which not very numerous and extremely unskilful workers were laboriously carrying out horticultural experiments, to a very garden of the Hesperides. A good deal will be found in some books about a certain "Areopagus" at Leicester House, the equivalent of the famous French *cénacles* of earlier and later times. We must not, of course, make too much of this. Spenser had certainly found his way, if not fully, before he was ever introduced to Leicester, and there is little or no evidence that the Leicester House influence counted for anything at all in the great dramatic outburst.

The Leicester House circle.

But the *coterie* just mentioned did play a part, important, though not to be exaggerated, in the new development. It included Sidney, Spenser, the future Lord Brooke, Harvey, Dyer, and others, with the occasional accession of notable foreigners, such as Giordano Bruno, and the participation of ladies, of whom Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke, was the chief. Nor is there any reason to doubt that Sidney was in reality, as well as in position and rank, its centre and head. His genius was indeed inferior to Spenser's by a long way. But it exceeded that of any other of the members, and it is peculiarly noticeable that it looked in more directions than one. For a young man—he was but just over thirty when he died—living in a time with, so to speak, no literary background, with no master to imitate, no blazing popularity to envy

Sidney.

and seek to share, it is no mean thing to have left the *Arcadia*, the *Defence of Poesy*, and *Astrophel*, with minor things accomplished, and with a sort of tradition of established influence which is inferior to that of few in our literature. The tradition might have been a fond imagination or the work of flattering parasites, but the work is there to support and justify it. The work may be flawed, tentative, unequal, but the tradition is justly to be counted in as no mean makeweight.

Philip Sidney was born in 1554. His father was Sir Henry Sidney, afterwards Deputy of Ireland; his mother Lady Mary Dudley, sister of Leicester and daughter of the beheaded queen-maker who was for a time Duke of Northumberland. He gave an early example of those public-school friendships which have counted for so much in English history, with Fulke Greville at Shrewsbury; but the pair were not undergraduates together, for Greville went to Cambridge and Sidney to Christ Church. But it was probably owing to Greville that Sidney, when, after much foreign travel, he settled in London, came in contact, probably about 1578, with Gabriel Harvey, and through Harvey with Edmund Spenser. Sidney's heroic death at Zutphen did not take place till October 1586, and though his attention to literature must have been broken by more than one employment, he had the best part of ten years (for he returned from his travels in 1575) to work in. His life.

The actual achievement in his books[1] is high—much higher than has sometimes been allowed; but the genius of Sidney was fine rather than vigorous. What is most eminently remarkable in him, and what most justifies the reputation he achieved with his contemporaries, is the extraordinary way in which his performance, under all its disadvantages, covers almost the whole ground, in criticism or in creation, of Elizabethan literature. He wrote no dramas (unless the juvenile *Lady of May*[2] be called a drama), and in his *Defence of Poesy* he takes what we now see (with the easy cleverness of posterity) to be the wrong side about the kind of drama to be cultivated. But he made no mistake about the fatal folly of Gosson's objection to drama and poetry generally, and in the immortal words about "Chevy Chase" he gave, all unknowing it, the motto of English poetry. Nay, he did more than this, for in his practice of verse, though comparatively scanty, occasional, and utterly unrevised, he indicated and essayed in many forms the lyric which was to be one

[1] An edition of Sidney's *Works* has been begun by M. Feuillerat (Cambridge, 1912). Dr. Grosart in 1873 collected the whole *Poems; Astrophel and Stella* has been several times separately reprinted. So has the *Defence*. Dr. Sommer in 1891 reprinted handsomely the first edition of the *Arcadia*.

[2] A sort of masque, said to have been written for Elizabeth at Wanstead in 1578, and appended to some editions of the *Arcadia*.

of the coming age's chief exploits, and he struck the note which was to be the note of the poetry of that age generally. So too, though his prose consists only of the tiny critical tractate of the *Defence* and the large but rather formless romance of the *Arcadia*, he managed here also to exhibit the coming events with a wonderful precision of shadow. In form this prose is not great; the nearest approach to mere flattery in regard to him is the attempt, countenanced by no less a man than Drayton, to represent his style as a deliberate counterblast to the extravagances of Lyly. On the contrary, there is nearly as much "Euphuism" in the *Arcadia* as in *Euphues*, though it is Euphuism with a more definitely Spanish difference. But it is true that the *Defence* exhibits a much more sober scheme of prose; and it is also true that in throwing the *Arcadia* into the form of the prose romance Sidney was anticipating by generations, and almost by centuries, the shape into which certainly the most copious, and some of the most exquisite, developments of English prose were to be cast.

The *Apology for Poetry*, or *Defence of Poesy*, as it was successively named, must, from the known date of Gosson's pamphlet, have been composed about 1580 or the next year. The same period, during which Sidney is known to have made a long stay at Wilton with his sister, probably saw the composition of most of the *Arcadia*, which in its turn contains a very large proportion of the *Poems*. The date of the writing of the *Astrophel and Stella* sonnets is uncertain. Penelope Devereux, who was pretty certainly Stella, was already married to Lord Rich when Sidney married Frances Walsingham in 1583, but all attempts to date the sonnets exactly are guesswork.

The sonnets.

Their form is that specially English scheme in which the triumphs of Shakespeare were to be achieved, and which is arranged in three quatrains and a couplet; while the rhyme arrangement vacillates. The uncertainty, however, of the period is shown in the occasional adoption of Alexandrines instead of decasyllables as the base verse—an undoubted mistake, as the Alexandrine in English is too long a line to adapt itself in bulk to any complicated stave.

Many minor details show, as this does, the immaturity of the writer, and the fact that he was writing, so to speak, in the dark, or only with the dim lights of Surrey, Wyatt, and Sackville to help him. But the stuff is of the best. The final line of the first sonnet—

> Fool! said my muse [to me,] look in thy heart and write;

the splendid soar of the opening of the seventh—

> When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,
> In colour black why wrapt she beams so bright?

the famous "Moon" sonnet, familiar from many anthologies, and exhibiting in the most interesting fashion the superiority of the opening couplet—of the first jet—to what follows; the enigmatical "I might," on which many hypotheses have been built; the various "Sleep" sonnets, exercises in a most favourite tourney of the age; the interesting

I never drank of Aganippe's well;

the brilliant extravagance of the "Edward the Fourth" piece; and the stately music of the hundred and seventh and hundred and tenth sonnets—

Stella, since thou of right a princess art,

and

Leave me, oh love, which reaches but to dust,—

these things, with many others, make up a tale which in the circumstances is merely astounding. The songs included in *Astrophel and Stella*, with one exception, are a little inferior to the sonnets, but they are not less interesting, inasmuch as the effort to secure a lyric medium is obvious, and though not quite successful, is not wholly defeated. The heavy thud of the best work of Googe and Churchyard, even of Turberville and Gascoigne, is gone. We do not yet quite "sing," but we have quite got rid of the fatal drop into unquestioned "saying." And in all Sidney's verse—the *Arcadia* fragments, the Psalm versions, etc.—this sense of the broken ice, of the fleeing winter, of "Lent coming with love to town" at last, is the pervading charm.

The virtues of his prose are different, and have been partly anticipated. The *Apology* or *Defence* (first printed as the former in 1595) has so far an interest of style that it is in parts straightforwardly and vigorously written. But its interest of matter far outruns this. Gosson (see note *ante*) had exhibited the clash of the two currents of the day which had most force in them—the scholarly and literary impulse on the one hand, and the Puritan "craving for righteousness," as some call it (the intense desire to make somebody else uncomfortable even at a slight sacrifice to yourself, as it is phrased by others). Sidney, a scholar, a poet to the bone, and an experienced politician, young as he was, must have felt the danger, and may have attempted a sort of *modus vivendi;* yet much of the *Apology*, in its exaltation of the classical theories, is merely an echo of what had been said twenty years earlier by the Pléiade in France, if not of the common form of the Renaissance in all countries. It is unlucky, no doubt, that he joins the heretics who say that verse is only an accident of poetry, and that he condemns that very mixture of tragedy and

The *Defence of Poesy.*

comedy which at the moment in two different countries, Spain and England, was raising and to raise the drama to such a height as it had never previously attained. But no one can be more wise than destiny.

The *Arcadia* is, except in scale, less interesting, if only for the tolerably sufficient reason that it is excessively difficult to make out exactly how much of it is Sidney's at all. He wished, it is said, on his deathbed, to burn it. But his sister would not consent, and as *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* it was published in 1590. It is an obvious following of the late Greek romances and the Spanish *Amadis* series, in the spirit which was at the same time, or a little later, to bring forth Honoré d'Urfé's *Astrée* and the enormous roll of French imitations. It is thus principally noticeable in scheme as an instance of the impulse towards prose fiction which has affected all ages, though it never came to anything till long after Sidney's death. The high heroic spirit it displays captivated all good wits in its own and the following generation. But it is a "*Tendenz*-book" rather than a book in itself, and it illustrates the eager striving which animated Sidney's circle with less success than *Astrophel and Stella*. The mannerisms of its style, which have puzzled and misled commentators, appear, as has been said, to be directly imitated from the Spanish.[1]

The *Arcadia*.

It may be thought that too much space is given to Sidney. Yet his personality does seem in some strange way to have rayed out more influence than that of any man of his generation. And his positive achievement has been more often belittled than exaggerated. Indeed, if Edmund Spenser himself had died when Sidney did, and if nothing of his survived but what was published before that date, there would be poetical justification for calling Sidney the greater, though the less accomplished, poet of the two.

Very little is known, though a good deal has been laboriously inferred and conjectured, about Spenser's parentage and his early years generally. There is no reasonable doubt that he was of a family of Spensers settled near Burnley in Lancashire; but he was born in London about 1552. He appears to have been a Merchant Taylors' boy, and certainly matriculated at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, in 1569. He seems to have been poor, and was assisted from charitable funds. But if (and there can be no reasonable doubt of it) the translations from Petrarch and Du Bellay into English blank verse, which appeared in the same year in Van der Noodt's *Theatre of Voluptuous Worldlings*, and which in 1591 were, with alterations from blank verse to rhyme, reprinted as his, be genuine, they are evidence

Spenser.

[1] See p. 271 *sq.* of Mr. David Hannay's *The Later Renaissance* (Edinburgh, 1898).

that he was a very promising scholar. He remained at college for the then usual seven years, taking his Bachelor's degree in 1573, and his Master's in 1576. He was not fortunate enough to change his sizarship for a fellowship; and seems to have left Cambridge for the North with very dubious prospects. He had, however, made friends with a man somewhat older than himself, Gabriel Harvey, a Fellow of Trinity Hall. By 1578 Harvey had, in some way or other, secured the patronage of the powerful favourite Leicester, and he wrote to Spenser to come and share his good luck. Whether, as is at least probable, this was the origin of Spenser's introduction to Sidney, Leicester's nephew, or whether, as suggested above, Fulke Greville had made the Cambridge literary group known to his schoolfellow, is impossible to say, and does not matter; indeed, the two things are quite compatible. But Spenser was unquestionably from this time enlisted in the Leicester House set, and he seems to have been sent by Leicester to France in the autumn of 1579. Next year he was made secretary to Lord Grey of Wilton, Deputy of Ireland, and with him was present at the famous Smerwick business, where a crew of Spanish and Papal filibusters were put to the sword, on the 10th of November. He did not leave Ireland with Grey, but received various offices there, and in 1588 obtained, or rather bought, an allotment of some three thousand acres of the forfeited Desmond lands in County Cork at Kilcolman, where he proceeded to reside, buying also the office of Clerk of the Council of Munster. In 1589 he went back to England, being now under the protection of another favourite, Raleigh. He spent at least part of two years in London, frequenting the Court and playing the part of suitor, not without some grumbling. But he obtained a pension of £50 a year, a considerable sum for the time and sovereign, against, as tradition has it, the influence of Burleigh. Three years later, at the mature age of forty-two, but with poetical results worthy of twenty, he married a certain Elizabeth, probably Elizabeth Boyle. He went back again to London in 1595; but the end of his days was not far off. In 1597 he returned to Kilcolman with his wife and three, soon to be four, children. He became Sheriff of Cork in September 1598, and immediately afterwards Tyrone's rebellion broke out, Kilcolman was burnt and Spenser fled, first to Cork and then to London, where, in January 1599, he died, there is no trustworthy evidence from what cause.

Spenser's life, though the facts are scanty, is not uninteresting, and it is not quite unimportant to know that he shared the strenuous and varied living of his great time; but he might not have done this and yet be one of the foremost figures of English literature. His plans and projects were numerous and early; not a few of them

seem to have been actually carried out, though no remains exist. But his exile in the hills of the North, though it seems to have witnessed an unhappy love-affair with the "Rosalind" of the *Calendar*, gave him time to exercise poetical genius. Nearly ten years had passed since he showed what he could do as a mere boy in Van der Noodt's book, when this his first real work appeared, ushered and commented on by one "E. K.," "from my lodging at London this 10th of April 1579," dedicated to Sidney and addressed by the editor to Gabriel Harvey.

About this "E. K." disputes have arisen. One monstrous theory has been started to the effect that it was Spenser in mask—a theory of which all that can be said is that, if it be true, Spenser, instead of being, as he is generally taken to have been, one of the noblest and most high-minded of English men of letters, was a shameless self-puffer. Indeed, the style and general tone are unlike Spenser's, and argue very little original genius or even talent in the writer. That Spenser may have supplied some of the information is very probable, and would not be in the least discreditable. Meanwhile "E. K." is identified, in fair likelihood, with a certain Edward Kirke, a contemporary and friend of Harvey and Spenser. He supplies a good deal of elaborate ushering, some not useless glossarial and other exposition, a few comments, harmless if nothing more. If he is to be believed, he wrote other commentaries on works of Spenser's which have not come down to us.

As for the *Calendar* itself, it is a collection of twelve eclogues, one for each month of the year, and mostly, though not always, in dialogue. There is no prevailing metre, the first eclogue being in the six-line stanza; the second in the famous metre which, as we have seen, is found as far back as the *Genesis and Exodus* of the thirteenth century, but which Coleridge thought himself to have invented, and certainly re-invented, in *Christabel*; the third in another six-line stanza of shorter lines; the fourth divided between elegiac quatrains and a lyric stave; the fifth half Chaucer, half *Christabel*; the sixth in octaves; the seventh in the rather lolloping eights and sixes which the earliest Elizabethan poets had loved; the eighth partly in sixains, partly in eights and sixes, treated with more freedom than before; the ninth again in the *Christabel* form; the tenth in a different sixain; the eleventh again in quatrains and a sort of Pindaric; and the twelfth in the sixains of the first. Each has at the end one or more "emblems"—a variety of the "posies" so much affected by the Elizabethans.

The general scheme of the poem or poems was taken naturally from preceding eclogue-writers—Theocritus, Virgil, and the moderns, Mantuan, Marot, and so forth. The language (as ought to have

been seen from the first, and indeed was partly) is not a natural dialect of any kind or district, but partly imitated from Chaucer, partly seasoned with Northern words. It is much cruder and more unskilfully archaic than the exquisite vocabulary which Spenser was soon to work out for the *Faërie Queene;* and is chiefly responsible for Ben Jonson's too cavalier sentence that Spenser "in imitating the ancients writ no language."

The *Shepherd's Calendar*[1] does not contain any of the finest passages of its author's poetry, but it at least shows the existence of an instrument on which the finest passages of poetry could be played. For the next ten years Spenser was busy on other things as well as on poetry, and it was not till the 1st of December 1589 that the first three books of the *Faërie Queene* were entered at Stationers' Hall. They appeared in the following spring. In 1591 a volume containing *The Ruins of Time*, *The Tears of the Muses*, *Virgil's Gnat*, *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, *The Ruins of Rome*, *Muiopotmos*, and the *Visions*, and including, as has been said, a revision of the twenty years earlier *juvenilia*, was published. It is worth noticing that Spenser here for himself, as Kirke had earlier done for him, gives a list of promised books which never appeared. This phenomenon is by no means uncommon in literature, and it may be set down with equal probability to an active imagination outrunning possibility, and to a ruthless critical temper which would not allow anything that it did not think perfect to appear. This volume was generally entitled *Complaints*, Spenser at this time being in melancholy mood, and *Daphnaida*, which followed, exhibits the same drift. His marriage changed his tone remarkably, and 1595 saw the *Amoretti* sonnets, the *Epithalamium*, and *Colin Clout's Come Home Again;* while at the very earliest of 1596, the completion of the *Faërie Queene*, except the odd cantos, was published, with the glorious *Four Hymns*, and the *Prothalamium*, not like the *Epithalamium* on himself, followed. He published nothing more, his prose *State of Ireland* not appearing till long afterwards. There are no Spenserian Apocrypha worth mentioning, save *Britain's Ida*, a pretty poem, but quite obviously of a later cast, in the key of the imitations of Shakespeare's two earlier poems and Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*.

Almost the whole of this later work (with, in the case of the 1591 volume, exceptions for some evidently early things not quite perfectly revised) stands on the same level and deserves the same praise. The towering bulk and the substantive interest of the *Faërie*

[1] The title was undoubtedly taken from a book extremely popular in divers languages with the generation before—a work of astrological, medical, moral, and miscellaneous information, the early English form of which has been reprinted by Dr. Sommer, London, 1892.

Queene give it the necessary supremacy among its smaller peers. But if they stood alone without the epic and without the *Calendar*, we should undoubtedly be deploring the unkind fate which had prevented the poet who gave us these from giving us anything greater. The 1591 volume and *Daphnaida* rank much nearer to the *Calendar* than the rest of the minor works; their positive beauty is not of the absolutely commanding order. Yet there is a certain advance in the mastery of mere verse, in the faculty of communicating "cry" and echo. And in *Mother Hubbard's Tale* there has been generally and rightly noticed the exhibition of a satirical faculty which is not subsidiary, which is complementary, to the faculties displayed in the *Faërie Queene*.

But the others are of far higher quality. The *Prothalamium* for Lady Elizabeth and Lady Katherine Somerset is a delightful poem; but it naturally lacks the personal passion of the *Amoretti* and the *Epithalamium*, the former the best early sonnets in final couplet form next to Shakespeare, the latter by common consent unsurpassed in its own kind, as are the *Four Hymns* in theirs. These poems, which it is very desirable to take together, express a peculiar Renaissance note, the union of intellectual and sensual rapture, as no others do. And their form corresponds to their matter. The poet can by this time do anything he likes with rhyme and rhythm, with language and metrical scheme. No bead-roll of the greatest poems in English, which disregards conditions of mere bulk, can omit the *Epithalamium* and the *Four Hymns*.

Nevertheless the *Faërie Queene*, the best known, is also the best of Spenser's work. In this great poem, which some have put first for actual greatness, and which can hardly in any competent estimate yield the place for charm, if not for majesty, among long poems in English, Spenser displays at the very full all the gifts and graces which he showed in his minor work, and more. The *Calendar* and the *Sonnets*, the *Epithalamium* and the *Hymns*, are but the chapels and chantries of the cathedral of the *Faërie Queene*. Rather strange attempts have sometimes been made to belittle the achievement, which is the most striking and the most pervading in the book, the invention of the Spenserian stanza. Some have even said that he "took it from the Italians," which in any sense which is not next to nonsense is simply false. Others have dismissed it as a simple putting of an Alexandrine on to the eight-line stanza. The fact is that it is one of the crowning achievements of poetical inspiration in form. It stands alone in the combination of individual beauty and faculty, with suitableness to a long connected poem. Naturally, and it might seem inevitably, the latter quality is found in nearly all verse forms to exist in inverse ratio to the former. The Spenserian

almost alone combines the two; and while the single stanza is often as complete and as beautiful as a sonnet, the whole flows with an evenness and absence of break which not the most ingeniously arranged "sonnet-sequence" has ever attained.

The poet's success in language is certainly more contestable; but not much diminution can be allowed in the credit due for it. The extreme and sometimes rather rugged archaism of the *Calendar* has been smoothed away, and Spenser's immense advance in melody at once makes it easy for him to select only beautiful words, and unnecessary for him to carry archaism beyond a slight degree. It is but now and then that there would be any difficulty in printing a stanza of the *Faërie Queene* in modern spelling without a single strange word, though no doubt the poet sometimes sees his account in using licenses both in vocabulary and spelling.

With such a metre and such a lexicon marvels in verbal music become almost easy. Hardly any two stanzas of this enormous work will be found exactly to repeat each other in cadence. The secrets of varying the cæsura of the line and of using or abstaining from *enjambement* or overlapping, which have been by turns ignored, recovered, and abused, and on which rests practically the whole art of rescuing any metre from monotony, were perfectly well known to Spenser, and as cunningly used by him as by any of his followers. Nor can he be said to be ignorant, though he employs them rather less, of the other two great metrical secrets, the use of trisyllabic feet and the distribution of words of varying weight and length over the line.

As for subject, Spenser's was a great one; and it was capable, even in his own time, of being regarded from curiously diverse points of view. Half told as the tale is, it is impossible to be certain how far Spenser had a fixed plan of adjusting the whole to that slightly concealed allegory of the state of England which, though too much attention may be paid to it, the poem does contain. There was more than the mere courtiership of the time in the obvious glances at Queen Elizabeth, not merely in Gloriana, but in Belphoebe, and perhaps to some extent in Britomart. We may wish that there were less colour for the hint of Leicester in Prince Arthur, and of Queen Mary in Duessa, and it may seem rather idle curiosity to inquire whether Artegall really has anything to do with Lord Grey of Wilton, where Raleigh comes in, and so forth. There can, however, be no doubt that there is a certain amount of double meaning of the kind, that it interested contemporaries, and that it was intended to lead up to some sort of end. Indeed, the general story of the chief characters, though very slowly and with vast overlayings, does make some progress even as it is amid the completer *historiettes* of the adventures

of the several Knights of the Virtues, and the almost bewildering panorama of beautiful pictures which the poet calls up at every step, and which no doubt constitute the main interest and delight of the poem to modern readers.

To Spenser, moreover, as to all the great men of his great generation, virtue and vice were not commonplaces in any sense that admitted of their being despicable or negligible. By a redoublement of his allegory—not so much the allegory, which had not yet entirely relaxed its very tyrannous hold on the later Middle Ages, as that which must always maintain its grasp on poetry—the *Faërie Queene* was also intended to be a picture of Life, of Conduct, worked out by the treatment of certain great Virtues or excellences. Holiness, Temperance, and Chastity, Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy, are celebrated in the books actually existing. Magnificence, in the full Aristotelian sense (though he must rather have meant Magnanimity), was intended, we learn, at once to provide the special subject of another, and, as exemplified by Prince Arthur, to appear in and dominate them all. But of the actual distribution of the last six books no trustworthy testimony remains, and only tradition vouches for the fact that they, or some of them, perished in the sack of Kilcolman. Only the odd "cantos of Mutability," intended to be attached to a book of Constancy, survive; and as they are not inferior (they contain the gorgeous procession of the Months and Seasons) to the very best of the earlier work, it is pretty certain that what we have lost would be no disappointment if it were found. Indeed it is, for many sound reasons of poetical criticism, extremely probable that Spenser proceeded on the plan of indulging his genius by the composition of great fragments such as this, and, instead of hastily cobbling up a context, left them till he could worthily work them into the larger whole.

It is not true that such passages, though they are not perhaps very difficult to identify and separate nowadays, form the sole or even the chief attraction of the poem. On the contrary, they are never so beautiful as in their proper places; and the *Faërie Queene*, more than almost any other poem, demands and deserves to be read as a whole if its full charm is to be comprehended and enjoyed. But there is no reasonable doubt that the accessories of Spenser's scheme have become of more importance in poetical appeal than those things which to him were perhaps the chief. We shall never, if we are wise, forget that he is, as Milton called him, "our sage and serious Spenser," but wisdom will still insist that we regard him first of all as the poet and prophet of Beauty—the beauty of heaven and of earth alike.

This is perhaps the best place to notice a strange craze already referred to, which seems at one time to have been in danger of

seriously infecting Spenser—the projected "reform" of English verse by the production of actual classical metres, especially hexameters.

This was a general and, strange as it may seem, a not quite unintelligible mania of the Renaissance generally, and had been tried in other countries besides England. The reason of it is perfectly plain. The eager spirits of the day in both France and England had outgrown the good old verse of their respective nations; they thought (and rightly) that the recent verse was not very good, and being as yet novices in comparative criticism, they jumped to the conclusion that what they justly admired in Greek and Latin poetry might be reproduced, or at least rivalled, by the use of an identical prosody. It was certain that such a learned body as the Sidneian clique would at least not reject this notion *ab initio*, and for a time it seems to have received a favourable hearing there. Ascham, a delightful prose writer but of a most unpoetical turn, had advocated the thing long before, and Thomas Drant, another St. John's man of a younger generation, had left certain posthumous "rules" on the subject.

The "classical metre" craze.

This mania was taken up, either from crotchet or sincerely, by many in- and outside Sidney's circle, including the meritorious critic Webbe (*vide infra*), and by none more than by Gabriel Harvey, who had become Fellow of Trinity Hall. Harvey is one of those intrinsically unimportant persons who by accident have acquired a very considerable place in literary history; and there have even been fierce battles over the question whether he was a pedant or not. If not, it is very difficult to know to whom the adjective can apply. He was a genuine scholar in his own way—pedants very often, though not invariably, are. He deserves much thanks for having managed to put Spenser in the way of a preferment which enabled him to follow his genius instead of languishing as a poor scholar or hiding himself away as a country curate. It is not so certain that Harvey was wholly to blame for the distaste which he showed to the London Bohemian school, which will be shortly noticed; the great Marprelate dispute in which he was mixed up is still so mysterious in parts that it is very difficult to form any but the most guarded judgment on any matter connected with it; and it is certain that his principal literary antagonist and reviler, Thomas Nash, was at least as unscrupulous as he was clever.

But Harvey is condemned out of his own mouth. It is not Nash but himself who informs us that he thought the *Faërie Queene*—the greatest poem that English literature had yet seen but one, if with that exception, and the greatest poem save three or four, if with these exceptions, that English literature was to see—a fantastic trifle, much inferior to nine pseudo-classical "comedies," probably some-

thing like Daniel's later ones, which Spenser had also written, and which he had the good sense never to print. And again, it is not Nash, nor any one who trusts to Nash, but Harvey who tells us that he believed in the hexameter craze, that he exemplified it in many preposterous examples, and that he tried to force it on his contemporaries.

It is not certain how far Spenser himself was seriously carried away by this lunacy. Some have seen nothing but irony in the somewhat guarded and fair-spoken replies which he makes to Harvey on the subject, and it is certain that his own attempts in the style are few and rather laboriously ineffective, with a touch of genius in them, than hopelessly mad and bad. But we may perhaps see in his attitude rather that of an honest perplexity striving to adjust itself to what his elders and betters seemed to like, but convinced of their error by native genius, than any deliberate *persiflage*.

At any rate, he did little in the kind. Others were less wary, and Richard Stanyhurst, an Irish gentleman, achieved one of the most preposterous books of English literature in his version of Virgil. Nor did the craze die soon. It was formally revived after some years, and with some differences, by an exquisite poet in true English verse, Thomas Campion, and formally denounced by a true though less exquisite poet, Samuel Daniel. It animated, as we shall see, the interesting if limited body of Elizabethan critics. And the echo of it may be found long afterwards in Milton's curious heresies about rhyme—heresies which may be set down in part to an innate genius for blank verse striving to assert itself, but which, seeing that Milton could write as beautifully in rhyme as without it, may be more safely imputed to the singular cross-grainedness, the innate nonconformity, which mark the author of *Paradise Lost* in almost every relation of life and literature.

Besides Sidney, Spenser, and their *gracioso* Harvey, the Leicester House circle included divers other men of letters. Sir Edward Dyer, a very great friend of Sidney's and one of the pall-bearers at his funeral, but an older man, has the accidental interest of having been born at Sharpham Park in Somersetshire, the birthplace nearly two centuries later of Fielding. He was an Oxford man, a traveller, a diplomatist and courtier, and he outlived Elizabeth, dying in 1607. He had a very great reputation in his time as a poet, but his remains are small, and only one of them, the famous and excellent, but not superexcellent,

Other poets of Sidney's circle.

My mind to me a kingdom is,

has obtained much place in the general memory. Abraham Fraunce, a *protégé* of Sidney's, was a Shrewsbury boy and a Fellow of St.

John's College, Cambridge. His name occurs with fair frequency in the literature of the time, and he appears to have been a good scholar, but the most interesting thing about him is that he quoted the *Faërie Queene* two years before it was published.

More important than Dyer, and much more important than Fraunce, was Thomas Watson, a rather short-lived bard who died in 1592 at the age of thirty-five, but who, save for a certain frigidity, would take a high place, and who perhaps, considering his earliness, deserves no low one as it is. Watson,[1] who was a Londoner by birth and an Oxford man by education, translated the *Antigone* into Latin in 1581 ; but next year he produced an English verse book of great mark, the *Hecatompathia*, or *Passionate Century of Sonnets*. This, it is important to observe, was the very first of the great Elizabethan sonnet-collections, for Sidney's, though written, did not appear till years afterwards, and it was the tenth, not the ninth, decade of the century which saw the regular sonnet outburst. Watson was dead before this, but after his death another sequence, the *Tears of Fancy*, made its appearance, and he did other work. Watson.

It is just possible that if Watson had lived a little longer (though he was outgrowing the ripest poetical age when he died), or if he had been born a little later, the frigidity above referred to would have been melted. It appears to be the result, not so much of any want of natural heat in the poet, as of his mind being somewhat sicklied o'er with learning. As was the case with all these early Elizabethan poets of the great age, except Spenser, he could not wear this learning lightly, and he hardly dared use a phrase or form a wish if somebody Greek or Roman, somebody French or Italian, had not authorised the proceeding. That the sonnets of the *Hecatompathia* are not quatorzains, but a long eighteen-line form, of a class which the Italians had wisely rejected, does not matter much. The form is not so successful as the quatorzain, but neither Watson nor anybody else could tell that till he had tried it. It is more fatal that each piece has a prose commentary and discussion of itself, pointing out its originals and its special features, with parallel passages and all the most approved apparatus of classical editing. The *Tears of Fancy* are couplet-tipped quatorzains, after what is the specially English model ; but they do not gain much in freedom. Perhaps nowhere do we feel, so much as in reading Watson, the enormous benefit which was conferred upon English literature by the lawless excesses of the playwrights—some of them, Shakespeare at their head, men of no University culture at all.

It cannot be said that the last (and except Spenser and Sidney

[1] Ed. Arber.

by far the greatest) of this set who remains to be noticed offers any exception to this caution. Fulke Greville,[1] who was exactly Sidney's contemporary, was born at Beauchamp Court, Warwickshire, in which county his father represented a good family, while his mother was of the illustrious house of the Nevilles. He and "Astrophel" entered Shrewsbury together, and though they were parted during their University sojourn, the friendship continued, and the two served together, when they were twenty-three, on an embassy to the Palatinate. Greville was heir to great wealth, and increased it by buying lucrative offices. He was a favourite of the Queen—who, no doubt, did not like him less because he seemed to have no fancy for marriage. He was knighted in 1597.

Greville.

At the opening of the new reign, Greville, who had already received many gifts from Elizabeth, had Warwick Castle, which has remained with his descendants, bestowed on him. In 1614 he became Chancellor of the Exchequer; and in 1620 was ennobled as Lord Brooke of Beauchamp. Eight years later he was, it is said, stabbed by a servant in his house, the name and site of which are perpetuated by Brook Street, Holborn. In his youth he seems to have been the friend of most of the best men of his time from Sidney to Bacon; in his age he appears, though not certainly, to have acquired a character for avarice and moroseness. Almost nothing of his considerable work was published during his lifetime, the chief exception being the play of *Mustapha*, 1601. Some of his poems appeared in 1633, his *Life of Sidney* in 1652, and more poems in 1670. He was thus a practitioner in all three kinds, poetry, prose, and drama, and it is probable, though not certain, that his best work was early.

The plays *Mustapha* and *Alaham*, which could not possibly be acted, show the influence of the coterie in their form, which is that of the Senecan drama chiefly, and have a double portion of that special characteristic of Greville which will be noticed presently, as have his longer poems or poetical tractates on *Monarchy* and other things. But *Cœlica* is one of the earliest, and certainly one of the most remarkable, of the fashionable sonnet and song collections to a real or imaginary mistress. Some of the things in it are purely delightful, the best of all being that beginning

I, with whose colours Myra dressed her head.

But as a rule delight, except of a very peculiar kind, is not the sensation which Greville is apt to excite. Like Donne, his junior by some years, though with less exquisite exceptions to the rule of his

[1] *Works*, ed. Grosart, 4 vols. privately printed, 1870.

incompleteness, he is an example at once of the immense capability and of the desperate dangers of the Elizabethan cast of thought, and (till the dramatists had broken down many of its trammels) of the Elizabethan conception of literature. Greville would not write for the vulgar, and, as has been seen, he scarcely condescended to give it any opportunities of judging his work. From first to last there seems to have been on him a sense that literature ought above all things to be scholarly in form and elegant in substance, that it ought not to deal with trivial things, that "words to the wise," cryptic raptures, enigmatical sentences were the things to attempt. Not merely the "abstruser cogitations" in verse, in which Lamb had perhaps a slightly paradoxical though no doubt also a genuine delight, but his simplest prose works, exhibit this characteristic of laboured remoteness as do hardly any other things in English. In both he is eccentric, unpopular, impossible, but not uncharming.

A few individual poets and two interesting groups of poems have still to be noticed as properly contemporary with Spenser, Shakespeare and Drayton and Daniel being kept for later treatment. The chief of the former was William Warner, a poet who had his resurrection rather too early, and who perhaps on that account (he figures in Chalmers's *Poets*[1]) has had rather less attention than he deserves. Warner, who was probably born in 1558, and certainly died in 1609, was born in Oxfordshire and educated at Oxford, became an attorney, attached himself in some way to Lord Hunsdon, perhaps translated the *Menæchmi*, and certainly wrote *Albion's England*, 1586, and *Syrinx*, 1597. The latter, a collection of prose stories, is not of much importance; *Albion's England* has a good deal. At first sight it falls distinctly into the earlier and ruder class, being written in fourteeners, which, however, the poet did not divide, as his only modern editor has for convenience' sake ruthlessly divided them, into eights and sixes. It anticipates Drayton and Daniel; and it shows some similarity to Spenser, not in its verse, but in its attention to the history of England; while it has a further likeness to Drayton in trying to do for the history very much what the *Polyolbion* does for the topography of the island. There is little of the new learned grace or of the new passion about the thing; but it has many vivid touches, some passages of rhetorical force, and a general sense of power. Warner.

The poets other than Warner, with two exceptions, were not better executants than himself, and were much smaller men. Thomas Howell, an outsider of the Sidneian group, who wrote from 1568 to 1581 things almost sufficiently designated by their titles—*The Arbor of Amitie*,

[1] Vol. iv.

his *Devices*, etc.—belongs to a lower division of the same class with Turberville and Googe. Humphrey Gifford, whose *Posie of Gilly-flowers* appeared in 1580, has much more original force, could do the ballad measure well, has a spirited war-song, and some skipping anticipation of the *Nymphidia* measure. Much below either is Matthew Grove, whose poems were published in 1587, but must have been written somewhat earlier. Yet the care which has been expended in reprinting these[1] is not lost, because nothing can be more valuable than to have, at such periods as these, specimens of the ordinary run of verse. When such verse comes to be written, as in our own time and in others, by hundreds of volumes every year, it ceases to possess this interest altogether, and, except in the case of some singular cataclysm, is not likely to recover it. But some would except from these remarks the pair above referred to—Richard Barnfield (1574-1626) and Robert Southwell (1560?-1595). The former,[2] a Staffordshire squire, wrote not a little, but his memory is chiefly attached to *The Affectionate Shepherd* (1594), an amatory poem of classical or Italian rather than English inspiration, some others of no very dissimilar character, and one exquisite thing, the famous

As it fell upon a day,

which used to be ascribed to Shakespeare. Southwell,[3] a Jesuit priest, who was imprisoned and executed as a traitor, has also, but more certainly, left one splendid poem, *The Burning Babe*, and other religious pieces, which, in spirit if not in form, are much above the average.

The two groups which have been referred to above as necessary to complete the survey of poets strictly contemporary with Spenser are the sonneteers and satirists. Both, in their close connection with each other, and in their apparent adoption of fashionable styles, show that immaturity which is still characteristic of the time; each in different ways shows that time's abounding faculty.

The sonneteers of 1592-96.

It is not possible to decide with absolute certainty what induced the sonnet outburst of the last decade of the sixteenth century in England, and especially of its middle years. The form—"non moins docte que plaisante invention italienne," as Du Bellay calls it—was no novelty in the colder climes of England and France; it had taken both by assault nearly two generations earlier with Wyatt and Mellin de Saint-Gelais. But it is perhaps the best testimony to Sidney's real importance in English literature, that it was not till after his death, and till his sonnets

[1] All three appear in Dr. Grosart's *Occasional Issues*
[2] Ed. Arber. [3] Ed. Grosart.

were gradually divulged, that the sonnet outburst came. There was no mistake about it when it did come. Sidney's poems became known to the general in 1591, and the earliest form of Constable's (see below) next year. In 1593 appeared three remarkable collections, wholly or mainly in sonnet form, the *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* of Barnabe Barnes, the *Licia* of Giles Fletcher, and the *Phillis* of Thomas Lodge.[1] Lodge will reappear as a satirist, as a dramatist, and also as a pamphleteer. The chief achievement of Fletcher is to have been the father of two poets better than himself; and the sonnets of neither are very remarkable, though they testify to the powerful influence in the air. Barnes, though he did other work in prose and verse (a *Treatise of Offices*, a *Divine Century of Spiritual Sonnets*, a play called the *Devil's Charter*) must stand or fall by *Parthenophil*. It has been variously judged, and can never by a sane judgment be set extremely high, seeing that the author has no measure and would sometimes be much the better for having some. But it is a good specimen of the poetical intoxication of the time, which contrasts so curiously with the unintentional sobriety of the Googes and even the Gascoignes.[2]

These pioneers of the sonnet seem to have encouraged followers, for the next year, 1594, was very fertile in similar books. William Percy, a cadet of the house of Northumberland, and an Oxford man, published *Cœlia* (the trick of framing the set of sonnets as an address to a real or feigned mistress established itself at once). Two major poets, Drayton and Daniel, who will have separate notice later, issued, the first *Idea*, the second *Delia*. An anonymous collection, *Zepheria*, has not only intrinsic merit, but is one of the few Elizabethan books which represent very strongly and directly the French Pléiade influence. Willoughby's *Avisa* (nothing is known of Willoughby or of Avisa, but the book has been drawn into the Shakespearian comment-vortex), though not formally consisting of sonnets, belongs to the group in other ways. But this group's most characteristic constituent was the fuller form of Constable's *Diana*.

We know a very little more about Henry Constable[3] than about most of the interesting and obscure personages of the time; but we do not know very much. He was probably of the distinguished

[1] All these, with most of those to be mentioned presently, except *Zepheria*, are in Dr. Grosart's *Occasional Issues*. Several, including *Zepheria*, are in Mr. Arber's *English Garner*.

[2] Barnes's birth- and death-dates are unknown. He was a friend of Gabriel Harvey's, and, as Harvey's friends were wont to be, much mixed up in the literary asperities of the time, being for instance bitterly lampooned by Thomas Campion. But we have no real knowledge about him.

[3] *Poems*, ed. Hazlitt, London, 1859.

family still seated in the Holderness district of Yorkshire; he may have been born about 1554 (some say in 1562); he seems to have taken his degree at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1579; and he was a friend of the Bacons; but he was a Roman Catholic, and, as such, inevitably a member of an Opposition which in those days was exposed to things more unpleasant than mere exclusion from office. How he can, as some say, have formed part of Queen Mary's household in Scotland is not clear, seeing that he cannot have been more than fourteen at the date of the battle of Langside; but he certainly spent much of his middle life in exile abroad; and when he revisited England towards the end of the Queen's reign, he was thrown into the Tower, whence he only emerged after James's accession, and then not at once. He died before 1616 (some say in 1613). His verse was very highly esteemed by his contemporaries. It consists of the twenty-eight sonnets (twenty-three only had been printed in 1592) of *Diana*, the title of which, if it be necessary to seek any special origin for a thing which might have had so many, was probably suggested by the famous *Diana* of Montemayor; of another thirty or more, obtained from MS. on profane, and some seventeen on spiritual, subjects; of four prefixed to Sidney's *Apology* when it was printed, and of four contributions, not sonnets, to *England's Helicon*. The note of the whole of this work is a remarkable elegance and scholarly perfection, less "translunary" perhaps than the brightest comet or rocket effects of Elizabethan poetry, but steadier, more sustained, and in correcter taste.

Constable.

Alcilia, by "J. C." in 1595, contained sonnets by name which are as far from the sonnet nature as those of *Avisa*, but which are, as verses, sometimes pretty, though usually slim. And 1596 made up for the comparative sterility of its predecessor by giving not merely Spenser's admirable *Amoretti*, but three cycles by persons of whom next to nothing is known, *Fidessa* by Bartholomew Griffin, *Diella* by Richard Lynch, and *Chloris* by William Smith. *Fidessa* is the best of the three. Robert Tofte added *Laura* in 1597, and *Alba* in 1598. The general characteristics of these sonnets will be best given in the Interchapter summarising this Book. But the poetic impulse which they show was diffused over all the later years of the reign, and it is not least well shown in the last and best of the Elizabethan Miscellanies, *England's Helicon* (1600) and Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody* (1602).

The tendency of the Elizabethans to write in schools, and after for some time neglecting a model that lay before them, to copy it in flocks, is only less exhibited in the curious group of satires which coincided with the sonnet outbreak. Wyatt, if he had not quite

hit, had gone very near to, the regular satire form, and Gascoigne had actually achieved it; but their examples for a time produced no effect. It is still very uncertain what credence is to be attached to a MS. ascription of Donne's *Satires* to a date as early as 1593; and Donne's work will be best treated together and in the next Book. But Lodge, so often mentioned, and to be mentioned, most certainly issued *A Fig for Momus*, satirical in substance and in form couplets, as early as 1595; which makes the challenge of Joseph Hall, afterwards Bishop, to "follow him who list, And be the *second* English satirist," a piece of rather ill-tasted jactation. Hall published his *Virgidemiarum* in 1597, and was followed by Marston the dramatist with *Satires* accompanying his *Pygmalion's Image* in 1598, and *The Scourge of Villainy* in 1599. Guilpin's *Skialetheia*, Tourneur's *Transformed Metamorphosis*, and a few other things belong to the same school and nearly the same date.[1]

The satirists.

It is a school not to be contemned if we look at its members; less estimable, perhaps, if we look at this particular division of their works. Almost all are tainted with a very great coarseness, and injured by a singular and still not quite intelligible harshness of verse, which is most plausibly explained as coming from a corrupt imitation of Persius. The satire, like satire generally, has some value for its picture of manners, especially in Hall and Donne; but even this is vitiated by an obvious and rather tedious exaggeration both of tone and detail, which reaches its acme in Marston, as obscurity of thought and phrase does in Tourneur and roughness of versification in Donne.

[1] Donne's and Marston's satires are in all the editions of their work; Hall's are in Dr. Grosart's *Occasional Issues*, as is *Skialetheia*; the *Transformed Metamorphosis* is in Mr. Churton Collins's edition of Tourneur.

[*Fifth Edition.* The study of the sonneteers has been immensely facilitated by Mr. Sidney Lee's rearrangement and amplification of Mr. Arber's *English Garner* issues in two vols. of *Elizabethan Sonnets* (London, 1904). This contains an *Introduction* of great length, learning, and value. But it may be permitted to suggest that Mr. Lee lays rather too much stress on the borrowed character of the Elizabethan sonnet. The facts are perhaps not quite so much in favour of borrowing (still less of stealing) as of a certain "community of goods" among sonneteers ever since Petrarch, and indeed before him.]

Eighth Edition. Mr. (now Sir Sidney) Lee has continued the same line of investigation and arrangement on a larger scale, and in regard to lyric and other things, in *The French Renaissance in England* (London, 1910). The caution just advanced applies increasingly to this; but the assistance given by it to the study of Elizabethan literature is great.

CHAPTER V

THE UNIVERSITY WITS

The general drama of 1570-90—The University Wits—Lyly—His plays—Peele—Greene—Marlowe—Kyd—Lodge—Nash—Their work—Its kind in drama—Its vehicle in blank verse—Peele's plays—Those of Greene, Lodge, Nash, and Kyd—The lyrics of the group—Marlowe's plays.

THE history of the English drama during the particular stage of evolution which preceded its fullest development is, except in one well-defined and interestingly-peopled section, not so much difficult as impossible to trace. We have seen how the dramatic work even of a person who stands out from the common herd so much as Stephen Gosson is (though it would have been to the interest of the actors and poets whom he deserted to publish it) entirely lost. We know that the "Marprelate" controversy (*vide* next chapter) was actually brought on the stage in the Armada year or thereabouts, and the fact that, as we should expect, the play was instantly stopped, does not entirely account for, still less reconcile us to, the loss of the piece. Above all, it must have been at this time, that is to say in the years between 1570 and 1590, that the early chronicle-plays and others which Shakespeare honoured by selecting them as the canvases or palimpsest parchments for his own work first saw the light and the boards. But such remnants as we have of these plays are almost invariably of later date in their existing forms.

The general drama of 1570-90.

For the disappearance of this transition work more than one cause, probable *a priori* if not certain historically, is usually and reasonably assigned. Not only were the plays wanted for acting, not reading; but it was in the first place the clear interest of the rival companies, strolling or fixed, to keep their *répertoires* as much as possible to themselves. Further, the constant demand for novelty by audiences, and perhaps also the operation, in a different form, of the just-mentioned wish to keep a monopoly, seem to have led to the working up from time to time of old favourite pieces with new

material, either by members of the company or poets specially retained. The variations which (to take examples both from the beginning and end of the seventeenth century) we find between the quarto and folio editions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, between the quarto and the folio of Dryden's and Davenant's adaptation of the *Tempest*, show in the case of known men, who had an interest in keeping their work in some form, what must have happened in the case of unknown men, who were usually botching up, for a few shillings, matter which had not come to be regarded with even the smallest literary interest.

Towards the close of this twilight period, however, we come to a group of dramatic work produced by known or at least named persons (for our positive knowledge of most of them is extremely small), distinguished from the doggerel of the interludes and the starched sterility of the early blank verse plays by the presence in almost all cases of considerable, and in one or two of all but the highest, gifts, and exhibiting a very interesting community of circumstance, equipment, and even definite literary aim. All these men were probably, and all but one or two were certainly, of University training, an advantage less uniformly possessed by their immediate successors. For once the centre and source of a great literary movement in England was what it ought to have been—the two Universities. Not indeed that in all cases the various sets which fostered, and the various schemes which carried out, the literary developments of the time were actually formed at Oxford or at Cambridge, though there is reason to believe that in most cases they were. But the vast majority of the distinguished writers of the time (Shakespeare, it may be remembered, is not early) were University men; their friendships, which in the eager discussion of literary novelties always play so great a part, were in many cases University friendships; and it is notorious that the mighty group of playwrights who founded the English drama were called, not quite amiably, by the players who employed and rivalled them, "University Wits."[1]

The University Wits.

In this honourable function Cambridge had a little (though not so much as very pardonable partisanship has sometimes endeavoured to make out) the priority and the predominance. Thus Harvey, the "regent" (in scholastic and French sense at least) of the Areopagus or Sidneian coterie, was a Cambridge man, and so was Spenser; but Sidney himself was of Oxford. Of the great early dramatic group Marlowe, Greene, and Nash were Cambridge men, but Lyly, Peele,

[1] The *locus classicus* for all this is *The Return from Parnassus*, an extremely interesting set of three plays, first completely printed by W. D. Macray (Oxford, 1886).

and Lodge were Oxonians, as Greene himself subsequently became by incorporation. But there is no need to urge this controversy. The important point is that both the Universities did now begin to play, and played as they never quite have done since, their proper part in the national literary life. The reasons for this are not difficult to find, but they are interesting. The conversion of monastic property, and the shutting up of chantries, monasteries, etc., as outlets for private benevolence and piety, had made the founding of colleges, and of grammar-schools, the feeders of colleges, more than ever popular. The climbing of the secular clergy on the ruins of the regular, the permission of marriage to them, and their close connection with the collegiate system, established perhaps the happiest combined scheme of education and professional subsistence that any country has ever had—a scheme existing nearly untouched till our own day, when it was rashly upset. The various forms of new learning made the Universities interesting, not least owing to their contests with the old; the gradual opening of professional careers to laymen gave outlet and promotion from them; and if the demand in this way for clever graduates was not so great as now, it was increased in a way not now open by the institution, bad or good, of great men's households, about which young men of education and promise were wont to hang in a fashion, vague and now not quite intelligible, but certain as a matter of historic fact.

The oldest of the University Wits, though an outsider of the principal group, was probably John Lyly, and he deserves first mention not merely for this double fact, but because his chief literary performance (to be mentioned in the next chapter) was, though not in drama, considerably anterior to most of their work. Although we do not know very much about him even in his earlier dates, while his later are quite obscure, our knowledge is full and clear when compared to the "blanket of the dark" which surrounds such names as those of Kyd and, later, Dekker. Lyly was a man of Kent, and must have been born somewhere about 1553. He went to Oxford, his college being Magdalen (where he was probably a demy), took his degree in 1573, and tried a year later to obtain a fellowship through Cecil's interest. In the spring of 1579 he took his place once for all, though with an interval of obscuration, in English literature by *Euphues* (*vide infra*), and in the same year was incorporated at Cambridge. He furnished Thomas Watson (*vide supra*) with a letter commendatory in 1582, and between 1584 and 1594 (in the first year at least he was still battelling at Magdalen) furnished the Revels with nine plays, acted by the choristers either of the Chapel Royal or St. Paul's. These are *Campaspe*, *Sappho and Phao*, *Endymion*, *Galatea*, *Midas*, *Mother Bombie*, the

Lyly.

Woman in the Moon, the *Maid's Metamorphosis* (?), and *Love's Metamorphosis*. A dismal petition to the Queen in 1593 sums itself up in one of its clauses: "Thirteen years your Highness's servant and yet nothing." After this we know nothing of him positively, and even the entry which is supposed to be that of his death in 1606 is only connected with him by guesswork, for "Lyly" (Lilly, Lillie, etc.) has always been a common enough name, and there is little identification in "John."

His plays.

Lyly's plays,[1] like his person, stand quite apart from those of the rest of the group, with which they have nothing in common except the strong classicism, the presence of "University wit," the striking breach with the old tradition of horseplay interlude or wooden tragedy, the exquisite lyric which sometimes diversifies them, and their influence on the greatest dramatist of the next or any age. Written not for the public stage but as court amusements (or "abridgments," as Theseus would say), they have a good deal in common with the Masque. The very marked, not to say conceited style, and the strong, almost bitter, satirical spirit which appear in *Euphues* are also visible. But their most interesting historical characteristic is the way in which, uncertainly and tentatively, they strike out the way of Romantic Comedy, the most arduous and least frequently trodden of all dramatic ways, but when trodden successfully the way to the rarest and choicest of dramatic paradises. We must not say that if there had been no *Endymion* and *Woman in the Moon* there would have been no *Midsummer Night's Dream* and no *As You Like It*. But we may say boldly that before *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it is vain to look for anything of their special quality elsewhere than in Lyly.

At all events the difference between these plays and those of the other members of the group is most remarkable, and lies not merely in individual genius but in kind. The whole scheme and texture contrast with the vast majority of the work from Peele to Shirley. They come nearer to the antique form of the Interlude, though with little or none of the crudity of this. *Endymion* is a euphuistic allegory, where the loves of the hero, of Cynthia, and of Tellus, themselves but a shadowy centre or canvas, are fringed with humours more shadowy still. The accepted story of Campaspe and Apelles is treated in the same manner; while those of Sappho and Galatea form mere starting-points, from which the author diverges in directions not at all warranted by what may be called his authorities. It is much the same with *Midas*, while in the three last certain plays (the *Maid's*

[1] Ed. Fairholt, 2 vols. London, 1858. *Works*, ed. Bond, 3 vols. Oxford, 1902.

Metamorphosis[1] is not at all like Lyly) the writer trusts his fancy almost entirely, weaving, for instance, in the *Woman in the Moon*, out of the myth of Pandora a satire on woman, only suggested, and that in a most modern fashion, by the original. In short, the dramatic element in these plays is more than shadowy, it is phantasmagoric; and the form does hardly more than serve as vehicle for the author's glittering, if somewhat cold, fancy, his melancholy satire, and the *point-de-vice* spruceness of his tyrannically mannered style. He "sits a little apart," like Claverhouse in *Wandering Willie's Tale*, and there is nothing in him of the "dancing and deray" of the rest.

Of these George Peele[2] was slightly the eldest. He seems to have been of a Devonshire family, but may have been born in London about 1558. He was at any rate a Blue Coat boy and a member of Broadgates Hall (later Pembroke College) at Oxford, where he took his degrees—B.A. in 1577, M.A. two years later. Peele remained even longer than the customary seven years at Oxford, and seems to have only left it on his marriage, when he went to London and at once fell among the literary set. But he did not break his connection with his University, and in 1583, having already distinguished himself as a playwright, superintended the production of Gager's Latin plays at Christ Church before Prince Casimir. In the same year he contributed commendatory verse to Watson's *Hecatompathia*. Next year appeared his *Arraignment of Paris*, a sort of masque which had been written for the children of the Chapel Royal to play before the Queen. In yet another year, 1585, he was charged by the City with the disposing of the Lord Mayor's pageant, then no vulgar thing.

Peele.

These details are not otiose, because, though they cannot be said positively to disprove, they do not by any means fit in with, the tradition which makes of Peele a Bohemian reprobate, who died of debauchery and lived as a sort of vulgar Villon in London taverns. The former scandal is due to a gibe of Francis Meres, the egregious person who spoke of Anthony Munday[3] as our best plotter (though there was possibly a gibe in this too); the second depends almost

[1] This piece (which is not in Fairholt's edition, but will be found in the first volume of Mr. Bullen's *Old Plays*, London, 1882) is in couplets chiefly, whereas Lyly mostly affects blank verse or prose, and has been thought, with some probability, to be an early work of John Day.

[2] Ed. Dyce, in 1 vol. with Greene (London, 1885); ed. Bullen, 2 vols. (London, 1888).

[3] Munday (1553-1633) was one of the busiest literary hacks of the time, a playwright, a constant botcher-up of pamphlets about crimes and executions (he had brought about some of the latter as an ex-Jesuit seminarist and informer against Jesuits), and a voluminous, but according to Southey unfaithful, translator of the Spanish Romances of chivalry.

wholly on an apocryphal farrago of stories, most of them centuries older than Peele's time, called the *Jests of George Peele* or George "Pyeboard" (a play on the name). There is absolutely no known fact in the case except a letter of Peele's to Burleigh in 1596 (two years before, according to Meres, he died), which letter pleads poverty and sickness. It is possible for a man to be poor and ill without debauchery being the cause of either inconvenience.

Indeed much of the stuff which has been talked about the loose lives of this group of men of letters may be brushed away here *in limine*. It has been most insufficiently remembered—first, that the Puritan party, then growing always stronger and more unscrupulous, stuck at no libels against everybody and everything connected with the stage; secondly, that quarrels and jealousies between men of letters, unfortunately, have not been unknown to any age; thirdly, that the appetite for scandal in readers and the quest for "copy" in writers were not checked or corrected by any exact and regular attestation of fact. "Crowner's quests" were known, but it may be suspected that they were very irregularly held; there was no regular system of police, still less any of medical inspection, registration of deaths, and the like. In short, though there is no evidence justifying us in regarding the life of the University Wits in town as a pattern of morality and self-restraint, the evidence to the contrary is of the flimsiest and most suspicious description. In any case, Peele suffered less from it than either Marlowe or Greene.

Of this famous pair Greene, the less gifted, was the older. His birth-year is not known, but he may have been as old as Peele and can hardly have been born later than 1560. At any rate, he was admitted at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1575, and took his degree four years later. He subsequently not only proceeded M.A. in his own University but was incorporated as such at Oxford. Meanwhile he had travelled in Italy and Spain, and on his return to England in 1580 had launched one of the so-called "Pamphlets," which will be dealt with in our next chapter, or rather he had obtained a license for it. For almost exactly a decade, from 1582 to 1592, he seems to have lived in London (for the attempts to identify him with a Robert Greene who during part of the time was in orders and held a living are quite gratuitous), and he certainly died in the year last named. For some time before his death he had been engaged in writing a series of pamphlets, some of which appeared posthumously, and one of which, the *Groat's-worth of Wit*, contains a famous passage about his friends and Shakespeare, or at least "Shakescene." These purport to be dying speeches of repentance from a man who was conscious of an evil life and wished to warn his friends. They were taken at more than the letter by others,

Greene.

and a legend, due mostly to Gabriel Harvey, grew up of Greene's having died of a surfeit of "pickled herrings and Rhenish," and of his having lived in disreputable associations for some time previously.

The Greene legend is still less lurid than that of Greene's greatest companion. Christopher Marlowe was of rather lower social status than Peele and Greene, both of whom seem to have been sons of persons of some position. His father was a shoemaker at Canterbury, a clerk of St. Mary's Church there, and a freeman of the city. The poet was born in 1564, and at the age of seventeen, after earlier education at the King's School of his native place, entered Benet (Corpus Christi) College, Cambridge. Perhaps he was a *protégé* of the Chief Baron Manwood, a Sandwich and Canterbury magnate, on whom Marlowe perhaps wrote a Latin epitaph. But all these things are uncertain, and some of them share the uncomfortable doubts thrown on the trustworthiness of John Payne Collier. At any rate Marlowe (whose name occurs in the original documents in varieties—Marly, Marlen, Marlyn, and so forth—unusual even for that age of orthographic license) took his B.A. rather soon, in 1583, and his M.A. about the usual time from matriculation, in 1587. He must have gone immediately to London, for *Tamburlaine* was produced in the same year, or even in 1586, though it was not produced or published under his name. His career was extraordinarily short, and except from the legend we know nothing of it, while even the closing fact that he was stabbed in the eye by a certain Francis Archer in a tavern at Deptford on 16th June 1593, the blow being given by Archer in self-defence, is partly legendary, and the slayer's name is sometimes given as Ingram. Further, the occasion of the quarrel, if it has any evidence at all, rests on an allusion in a satire of Marston's, which has absolutely no verification. Further yet, some of the unlucky persons who have grubbed up every wretched document about our great men of letters of this time have unearthed an information by one Bame or Baines, a man who was afterwards hanged at Tyburn, charging Marlowe with disgusting vices, with loathsome blasphemy, and with the most offensive brag and chatter about both. It is not sentiment but a sound feeling which has led all true scholars to take refuge in the magnificent eulogy of Drayton, who must have had abundant knowledge, and who was no milksop, though we know that he held aloof from the Bohemianism of the gutter.

Marlowe.

This nauseous form of gossip fortunately gathers less about the rest of our group. Of the birth, fortunes, and death of Kyd next to nothing was known till the very recent discoveries of Mr. Boas. He may have been born about 1568, and was somehow involved in the charges against Marlowe. Of Lodge and Nash we know a little more, but of the first even legend has

Kyd.

nothing grimy to say, and of the latter not much. Both were named Thomas. Lodge was the son of a Lord Mayor and went to Trinity College, Oxford; while that he took to literature early is shown by his answering Gosson, *vide supra*, 1579. It is thought that he was probably then about man's estate. He for some years pursued the way of play, poem, and pamphlet. But by a fortunate chance, which may partly account for his escaping the snares of London, he went to sea with Cavendish in 1591, and on his return, though he at first settled down to the old literary round, he seems to have soon had enough of it. He turned to medicine, took degrees at Avignon and Oxford, became a Roman Catholic, and died in 1625.

Lodge.

Nash, the last of the group, was also the youngest. He was born in 1567, the son of a minister at Lowestoft, and entered St. John's College, Cambridge, as a sizar in 1582, when Greene had already made, and Marlowe was just about to make, a reputation. He died in the year of the century, at the age of only thirty-three, having lived apparently rather a struggling than a jovial life, having stoutly defended his friends (he left Cambridge in 1589, and therefore had time to know Greene and Marlowe), having done much rather ephemeral but vigorous and interesting work, in prose chiefly, and having repented with a repentance not open to the suspicion which besets that of his master and model Greene. He had perhaps the least genius of all the set, but he had abundant talent, and was even more than any of them a type.

Nash.

But it is time to pass from the lives of these men, so little known, so idly chattered over, so unimportant except to themselves, to their perennially important and interesting work. The constituents of this have been summed up above—play, poem, pamphlet. From Marlowe and Kyd we have no pamphlets; from Lodge very little play; from Nash not very much more, and hardly any non-dramatic verse worth speaking of. But the three classes were in this or that way the work of all. The prose will be dealt with in the next chapter; the non-dramatic verse—save in the case of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, and the exquisite lyrics which most of the group with unpremeditated, certainly with unimitated, art could pour forth—is not of much importance. "The play's the thing" with the group as such.

Their work.

The devotees of explanation have wearied themselves over attempts to get at the origin of this play. Perhaps it cannot be got at. Dickens, with all his genius, was not a very literary person, and yet he settled the riddle of literary history once for all in his account of the origin of *Pickwick* "I thought of Mr. Pickwick," he says; but how he thought of Mr. Pickwick he does not tell us; probably he could not have told. It will be enough

Its kind in drama.

for the wise that to some man or some group of men in England somewhere about 1580 the kind, blended as usual, of English play suggested itself. It is related to the older developments of the interlude; it is related to the classical play; it is still more closely related to the curious sub-variety of that play which was achieved in Nero's time by Seneca the tragedian, which affected all Renaissance Europe with so strange an influence, and which, as has been told above, had been already introduced into English. Kyd, one of the group, translated *Cornélie*, the most Senecan of the great Pléiade dramatist Garnier's imitations of Seneca. All his companions, it is clear, were students of Seneca. Fortunately, however, what ultimately attracted them most in this enigmatical writer was not the regular but the irregular side of him—not the stately iambic and the correct construction, but the lyric excursions of the chorus, the frequent tendency to the introduction of ghosts and supernatural agencies, the "blood and thunder," the bombast and the rant. It may seem a singular thing to give critical thanks for these last. Yet, so far as it is possible to decide upon such matters, it is practically certain that the period of violent fermentation for which these things served as yeast did actually give us, and to all appearance was needed to give us, the strong wine of the completed and perfected drama for some thirty or forty years after Marlowe's death. The earliest Elizabethan theatre had many faults, but the worst of them is its terrible flatness and woodenness. The drama of the Marlowe school may be called, if any one pleases, "a barbaric yawp"; but it is, at any rate when it is characteristic, never wooden and never flat.

Nobody ever innovates all at once and all of a piece; and it would have been something like a miracle if all of this drama had been characteristic. On the contrary, a good deal of it approaches the older stamp, and this may be particularly said to be the case with the work of the two eldest of the group, Lyly and Peele, though both informed it with far greater literary gifts and accomplishments than any earlier dramatist except Sackville had had it in him to show. This may be due, not merely to their age, but to the fact that, as has been said, both catered rather for court and other similar pageants than for the rough appetite of the popular theatre. But both did work strikingly good, and Peele much more than Lyly exhibits proficiency in that strange new vehicle of dramatic blank verse which is the triumph and glory of the school, which practically gave us Shakespeare, and which in isolated examples was fashioned—by Marlowe especially, but also by more than one other member of the school—with a majesty and music never since surpassed.

Its vehicle in blank verse.

This is one of the points in which Lyly stands apart. He has

blank verse, but it is of a different quality, and by far the greater part of his plays is in prose,—the natural instrument, though he could disport himself charmingly in lyric, of the author of *Euphues*. Where blank verse appears, as in the *Woman in the Moon*, it is noticeable that the play is late, and that the fashion of the verse has nothing in it very individual. Peele, if *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* be really his, wrote at least one play in the old fourteener which had been so popular, and which, as Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, to take no other example, shows, retained its hold upon writers and hearers pretty late. This play, which may be called a romantic interlude—it has a "vice" and two or three allegorical characters besides Alexander the Great, the two knights, queens, princesses, etc.—is of great interest, marking as it does an experiment in transition. The very early *Arraignment of Paris* is part in fourteeners and in heroics, part in blank verse. *Edward I.*—a play which has been rather unnecessarily reviled, because it adopts a popular ballad-scandal against Eleanor of Castile—has prose, blank verse, and doggerel. The *Old Wives' Tale*, which, in more ways than one, comes close to Lyly, is in prose with blank-verse passages. The *Battle of Alcazar* and *David and Bethsabe* are in blank verse only. Taking these facts together, combining with them that of Peele's seniority to Marlowe, and then examining the texture and quality of his blank verse itself, we may probably assign to this writer the chief originating impulse in the great change which the group impressed upon the form. His own, though it never attains to Marlowe's "might," is much sweeter than Marlowe's usual strain, and perhaps more equably good. He has not discarded all the tricks which we noticed in Gascoigne, being still fond (though not to the extent of the *Steel Glass*) of beginning batches or arrangements in verse with the same or nearly the same phrase. He has not quite emerged from the tyranny of the stopped line, though he seldom or never allows his feet to stump with the wooden tramp of *Gorboduc*. But he has learnt modulation, variety, cadence, and occasionally he can even *soar*—the best gift that this group discovered in the unrhymed decasyllable. It would be hard to find, in any author born earlier, such a "tower" of verse as in this speech of Tamar, which yet is not one of Peele's stock beauties—

Peele's plays.

> Cast, as was Eva, from that glorious soil,
> Where all delights sat bating, winged with thoughts
> Ready to nestle in her naked breasts,
> To bare and barren vales with floods made waste—
> To desert woods and hills with lightning scorched
> Where[1] death, where[1] shame, where[1] hell, where[1] horror sit.

[1] The original has "with," but "where" is clearly needed.

And he is sometimes almost Miltonic (Milton was a student of Peele) in such "carryings over" as—

> My sister Thamar, when he feigned
> Sickness.

In fact, the blank verse of Peele would repay a far fuller study than it is possible to give it here.

The minor members of the group are less remarkable in this respect. Greene,[1] especially in his best play, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, succeeds occasionally in imitating both the soaring and the fluency of Peele; but, as a rule, he is still somewhat too much addicted to the stopped line. Lodge, an agreeable prose writer and a charming lyrist, suffers still more from this old fault in his only known unassisted play, the *Wounds of Civil War*. Nash, a great pamphleteer, has but two plays to his credit, of which *Dido* is known to be partly the work of Marlowe, while great part of *Will Summer's Testament* is in prose, and the blank verse not merely shows a constant tendency to drop into couplet, but has no very distinct quality even when it is pure. Kyd, the last of the group, is much more important than any of these as a playwright. But *Jeronimo*, if it be his, constantly lapses into couplets; the *Spanish Tragedy* shows something of the same tendency as well as much of the stopped line; while the enormous speeches of *Cornelia*, overmastered by the monotony of their French original, succumb with too much regularity to the same malign influence.

Those of Greene, Lodge, Nash, and Kyd.

But side by side with the faculty for blank verse, all the poets hitherto mentioned have a lyric gift which certainly ought to have suppled and inspirited their "blanks," and perhaps did so. The universally known "Cupid and Campaspe" of Lyly is only one of the most regular, by no means of the most charming, of the songs scattered about his plays; and here as in other respects Peele is even more than his compeer. Greene's lyrical work, which is fortunately obtainable[2] separately from his very inaccessible prose and not too common theatre, contains

The lyrics of the group.

[1] His dramatic works, *A Looking-Glass for London* (the history of Nineveh written with Lodge), *James the Fourth of Scotland* (quite unhistorical), *Alphonsus of Arragon*, etc., are with Peele in Dyce's ed., and by themselves in a Clarendon Press ed. (1905) by Professor Churton Collins. Prose complete only in Dr. Grosart's "Huth Library." Lodge's and Kyd's plays are in Hazlitt's *Dodsley*, and Kyd in a Clarendon Press ed. (1900) by Professor Boas. Nash has been re-edited by Mr. R. M'Kerrow (London, 1904 *sq.*).

[2] See Dyce's and Collins's edd. of plays, and a volume of Bell's *Poets* (with Marlowe's). See also Bell's *Songs from the Dramatists* and Mr. Bullen's *Lyrics from Elizabethan Dramatists* and *Romances*.

nothing so exquisite as the best of these two men's work or of Lodge's; but is more abundant, has a little less the character of the mere snatch, and seldom or never sinks below a level more than respectable. As for Lodge himself it is in pure poetry, not in drama or in prose, that he can make his safest claim to a high position in English literature. His famous madrigal, "Love in my bosom like a bee," nearly the most charming specimen of a charming kind, then popular, is very closely approached by others of his achievements. Kyd and Nash seem to have had their lips less touched to song; and Marlowe's taste does not seem very frequently to have inclined him to the lyric, though another world-renowned example, "The Passionate Shepherd," shows what he could do when he chose. But his great contribution to poetry other than dramatic was the still more "passionate" narrative of *Hero and Leander*, which ranks with Shakespeare's Juvenilia, and, if it lacks the range and amplitude which, even at this early time, distinguish the work of Shakespeare, exceeds them in intensity and flame.

In Marlowe[1] himself the mighty line is so closely associated with the whole spirit and tendency of his drama that we cannot but take them together. We have from him, besides the work just mentioned, and some translations of Ovid and Lucan, seven plays —the two parts of *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward the Second*, the *Massacre at Paris* and *Dido*. The two last are the weakest, and contain little which we can feel sure that others may not have written. Of the remaining five *Edward the Second* is a regular chronicle-play, aiming at some unity of construction; the other four romantic tragedies of the wildest kind. In the two parts of *Tamburlaine* the conqueror, invincible in fight, insatiable of bloodshed, and hardly human except by his love for his wife, "divine Zenocrate," sweeps slowly past, regardless of all power and life and majesty but his own, trampling on Bajazet, putting man, woman and child to the sword, "showing" the virgins of Antioch "death" at the point of his lances, and only worsted by Death himself, who carries off first Zenocrate and then the tyrant. There is here no central action, only a dissolving series of scenes of terror and blood; no character except the dim and gigantic one of Tamburlaine. If the poet's imagination were of a less grandiose magnificence, or if he were not able to interpret it to us by the unsurpassed splendour and majesty of his versification and phraseology, the thing would be simply dull. The scale is too vast, the personalities too vague even to excite lively and poignant terror. It has not even "the fierce vexation of a dream," only the chaos of one.

Marlowe's plays.

[1] Ed. Dyce in one volume; ed. Bullen in three.

This cannot quite be said of the *Jew of Malta*. Barabas, the hero, is very much more of a person than the huge and shadowy figure of Tamburlaine, and the action is concentrated, or at any rate confined, within a much more manageable area. But the illimitable, the *apeiron* of Marlowe's imagination, intimates itself, for good and for evil, here also. Although the procession of the Jew's crimes is almost as little artistic as that of Tamburlaine's triumphs and butcheries, the intensity of the poet's personification of hatred and avarice and quasi-religious jealousy makes it far more alive. Yet perhaps no play makes us feel so acutely and distinctly the difference between Marlowe and Shakespeare, even if we take for comparison such possibly doubtful and certainly early and immature work as *Titus Andronicus*. Aaron has not received the touches which make Iago and Richard, Shylock and Macbeth what they are. He has still much, and too much, about him of the mere horror-mongering which is characteristic of this middle stage of our drama, and he is, of course, much less magnificent than Barabas. But he is also much more of a human being.

Although it is among the most chaotic, there can be little doubt that *Doctor Faustus* is the best of Marlowe's plays. For the chaos here is not quite out of keeping with the wild theme ; and that theme itself, in every other respect, is absolutely suited to Marlowe's genius. The whole spirit of the Faust story comports with—nay positively requires—not so much a regular dramatic action as a phantasmagoria ; and its separate scenes are, most of them, well suited to stimulate the towering imagination, the passionate fancy, the tameless and restless energy of this wonderfully though partially endowed poet. That the Helen passage and the death scene contain, with the single exception —if with that—of the great purple patch of *Tamburlaine*, as to "the pens that poets held," the most exquisite outbursts of sheer poetry in Marlowe, is no more than we should expect from the coincidence of inspiring quality in the subject and formal competence in the worker.

Edward the Second falls short, for the complement of the reason which makes *Faustus* so eminent a success. The history-play is not extremely exigent of order or of unity ; but to be good it must have something of both. Now order and unity were what Marlowe could never give. Nothing is more natural than that the foully-wronged Queen Isabel should transfer her affections to Mortimer. But Marlowe either cannot or will not take the little trouble necessary to bridge the interval which separates the loving and even forgiving wife from the rancorous adulteress. It might have been a little more difficult, but it was certainly feasible, to project the character of Edward himself so as to render the awkward facts credible and not

disgusting. But here again Marlowe does not so much as attempt it. The petulant and unmanly fribble of the first acts might have passed into the tyrannical and arbitrary prince, the not unwarlike lord, of the middle, and he in turn into the almost majestic victim of the end. But "the flats are not joined," and the magnificent speech—

Leicester, if gentle words might comfort me,

sounds utterly out of place in the mouth of the abject to whom we have been earlier introduced.

Yet in Marlowe two things never fail for long—the strange, not by any means impotent, reach after the infinite, and the command of magnificent verse. He may, as I have said, have learnt something of this latter from Peele, and he seldom approaches his master in sweetness, while he has some of the tricks of the whole school—the constant and sometimes very irritating habit of making the characters speak of themselves in the third person, the still too great tendency to stopped lines, and the like. But the weight and splendour which he impresses on his best passages made them famous at once, and have kept them so, except during the period when all these good things were forgot.

And what is true of Marlowe eminently, of Peele in a not much lower degree, is true of the whole group, save perhaps Nash, who is only a poet and dramatist by accident. They all intend greatly; choose great subjects; handle them, if sometimes with an almost childish want of common sense, yet with poetic imagination and creative force; make them the occasion of passages distinguished by verse of a splendour and momentum, if less often of a lightness and easy movement, never previously known in English. For anything that resembles the echoing thunder of the best decasyllables of these poets (not by any means of Marlowe only) we must go back to the hendecasyllable of Dante, to the hexameter of Lucretius, to the choric phrase of Aeschylus, and there is no fourth parallel in any language before them. Their contemporaries might sometimes gird at the "drumming decasyllabon." But the rub-a-dub of a drum is a curiously weak and inappreciative simile for the sound of the line of Marlowe, even for that of Peele and Kyd, of Greene and Lodge. It much better deserves one suggested by the words of that poet and critic of our own who has best appreciated it—

The thunder of the trumpets of the night.

CHAPTER VI

LYLY AND HOOKER—THE TRANSLATORS, PAMPHLETEERS, AND CRITICS

Ascham's prose—Defects of the type—The ebb and flow of style—Euphuism—*Euphues—Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit—Euphues and his England*—Their style—Its ancient instances—Its vernacularity—Its unnatural history—Hooker—Contemporaries of Lyly and Hooker—The translators—Their characteristics—The pamphleteers—Martin Marprelate—The critics.

THE prose of the great period of Queen Elizabeth's reign is one of the most interesting divisions, historically speaking, of all English prose. We left that medium of expression some years after the Queen's accession in a state which was best indicated by the work of Ascham, the principal prose-writer by far of the time, and one who embodied its dominant characteristics. The period of mere tentative, of experiments in stocking the vocabulary and arranging the syntax, had ceased, experiments in all directions had been made in point of subject, and at length a fairly normal style had been attained, suitable, as Ascham himself showed, for a good variety of literary purposes, if not for all.

Ascham's prose.

"Fairly," it has been said, but by no means finally. The style of Ascham was a pretty good style of all work; but it was not capable of distinction in more than one or two kinds. It was perfectly clear, very fairly advanced in balance and cadence, and possessing yet further capacities in that direction, well proportioned, logical, and sane. But like the later plain prose style of the eighteenth century, it had two drawbacks. It was very ill fitted for fanciful, gorgeous, or passionate expression, and it was constantly liable, when not used with something more than ordinary scholarship and taste, to degenerate into tameness, commonness, insipidity. In its horror of "inkhorn" terms, it was in danger of becoming dull; in its adherence to Latin arrangement and to certain stereotyped, or likely to be stereotyped, tricks of parallelism and antithesis it was in danger of losing raciness and vernacular variety.

Defects of the type.

Attempts to variegate it were certain, and they have been traced with more or less probability, or fancifulness, in the transition writers between 1560 and 1580. But these tendencies were carried so much farther, and the ideas which lay behind them were so much more brilliantly and importantly expressed in the famous book called *Euphues*, that it is really unnecessary to look behind that, except in making a special study of the particular subject. And even such a study might perhaps wisely avoid cumbering itself too much on the question whether Lyly's original is to be found through Berners in Guevara, or elsewhere, or in many elsewheres, or nowhere. The law of *maxima* and *minima* is more certain and constant in prose style than almost anywhere else. When the elements of such a style have been once got together, florid or plain style (it does not much, or at all, matter which) appears, and is in its measure and degree perfected. As it approaches perfection, men get tired of it and try something new, plain or florid, as the case may be, which in its turn rises, flourishes, decays, and is superseded. At hardly any time (though there are a few apparent exceptions) does either flourish quite alone; in hardly any case can the innovation, whatever it is, be directly traced back to any single case or beginner. Flux rules all, and we can only note with any precision the greater turns of the tide.

The ebb and flow of style.

Euphuism was certainly one of these. Like most things, it has been exaggerated as well as depreciated in importance, and objections have been taken to this or that use of the word—especially to the habit of employing the term generally, as well as specifically. This seems hypercritical. *Euphues* was the first conspicuous example in English of the determination to achieve an ornate, variegated, and rather fantastic style; and it is quite reasonable to allow the employment of the abstract terms formed from it as denoting, first, the specific characteristics of the book itself; and, secondly, in the usual transferred fashion, those of the genus to which it belongs, and which renews itself so constantly in species, with only minor differences.

Euphuism.

The life of Lyly has been already (p. 282) dealt with, but this book[1] preceded his plays. He was probably about six-and-twenty when its first part, *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, appeared in the spring of 1579. He was certainly still resident at Oxford, and an address to the "Gentlemen Scholars" of that University appeared in the second edition, which followed within the year. The second part, *Euphues and his England*, appeared next year (1580), and both were rapidly and frequently

Euphues.

[1] Ed. Arber, London, 1868, and Bond, *u.s.*

reprinted. The influence of the book has been sometimes a little exaggerated, and sometimes more than a little pooh-poohed, while from a period tolerably early in the seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth it was forgotten, and from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth misrepresented. But there is no doubt at all that for at least twenty years after its first appearance, if not for thirty or forty, Euphuism was a living, an active, and in the usual way and with the usual limitations, a triumphant force. Almost the whole of the more literary art of the curious pamphlet literature of the time followed it; it coloured, at least as much by direct imitation as by indirect revolt, Sidney's equally influential *Arcadia;* it had a very great influence on the dramatists, especially Shakespeare himself in his youth. This history guards most carefully against the undue interchange of *post* and *propter;* and we might have had, we should doubtless have had, Donne first and Browne later, with all the gorgeous language and quaint thought of which the two are the chief representatives in verse and prose, without Lyly. But in that case Donne and Browne, and all those about them, would have had to do for themselves something that, as it was, they found done to their hand.

It is necessary (and it has not always been done) to keep the matter and intention of Lyly's work separate from his manner. In the first point he was no innovator, and though it would not be correct to say that he was behind his time, he was not more than on a level with it, and was nearer obsolescence than innovation. His book is, in drift and thought, exclusively a Renaissance one; it is concentrated upon Education, and takes that view of Education itself which the Renaissance derived from Plato, and conditioned with its own thoughts in politics, religion, art, and what not. Nominally *Euphues* is a romance. Its first part, *Euphues, or the Anatomy of Wit*, opens at Naples, and treats of the courtship of the heroine Lucilla by the two friends, Euphues and Philautus—the Amadis and Galaor[1] *mutatis mutandis* of the story—and by a third suitor, vastly inferior to either, named Curio. In all Lyly's work (whether for reason or not, we have no evidence) there is a deep and heartfelt satire on woman, which quite transcends the mere stock railing of the Middle Ages; and Lucilla, of course, chooses the unfittest. But the bulk of the book is not story at all, and is made up of various letters of Euphues, the longest being one to Philautus after he has quarrelled with his friend for

Euphues, or the Anatomy of Wit.

[1] These contrasted (serious and light-o'-love) wooers of the great Portuguese or Spanish romance, themselves slightly altered copies of Lancelot and Gawain, produced an immense effect on the Renaissance, and were reproduced by hundreds of authors in different forms of poem, romance, and play.

Lucilla, and she has jilted them both; an orthodox dialogue between Euphues and "Atheos," the latter a person rather rife at this time; and, above all, a very important tractate entitled "Euphues and his Ephebus," which is based on Plutarch's treatise of education, and contains a great part of the real gist of the book. This includes a rather sharp criticism of the condition of things at Oxford, to which Lyly plays "Terrae Filius" a hundred and fifty years before Nicholas Amhurst, though not from the political point of view.

Euphues and his England lands the hero and Philautus in the author's own country, and after a short time at court. In this part Philautus is the chief actor. He pays his addresses to a certain Lady Camilla, a court beauty, who is unkind, and is, by the favour of another Lady Flavia, permitted a platonic friendship with her niece Frances as "his violet," which at the close of the book seems to give promise of being turned into something warmer. Meanwhile Euphues, after another quarrel with Philautus, withdraws himself first to study generally, and then, after eulogies on the ladies of England, Cecil (Lyly's patron), and the Queen, to the mountain Silexedra ("Flint-seat," in party Greek-Latin), whence the subsequent pamphleteers occasionally evoked his forlorn and somewhat priggish *eidolon*.

Euphues and his England.

The really noble aims and the somewhat romantic, but by no means unsound, views of love and life and learning which the age of Elizabeth held would hardly have saved this curious book from the fate of many others not far its inferiors in such respects, if Lyly had not been a great mannerist in style, as well as an active practitioner in thought, and if his style had not looked forward instead of backward, or at least merely at the present. It is evident that he was utterly discontented with the plain classicalised style of the Cambridge school. He was as classical as any of them, and he borrowed from them (or more probably from their originals) the practice of balanced sentences, in which some critics have erroneously seen his chief title to mention in the history of English prose. Here he was simply in the direct succession: he started nothing new as compared with Ascham or even Fisher. The point in which he was a pioneer, by which he caught the ear of the rising generation, and by which he has earned his real place in the story, is quite different. It is his revolt against the plain style, and the special means which he took for arming and enforcing that revolt.

Their style.

These were two, or it may be three, which shall be mentioned in the order of their departure from the practices common before him.

The first and by far the least original was a peculiar fashion of bringing in classical examples as similes or illustrations. Such examples in themselves had been commonplaces of the whole Middle

Ages, and had come thicker and faster in the fifteenth century and the early Renaissance. But Lyly used them with a difference. "Bucephalus lieth down when he is curried," says he, passing over as known already the ancestry and birth of Alexander, his campaigns, his death, and a few particulars about his successors, which the genuine mediæval taste would have thought excusable, nay, desirable, at this juncture, while even writers like Brandt and his translator Barclay would have thought it sinful to dismiss Bucephalus in less than a paragraph or stanza.

Its ancient instances.

The second, in which he innovated a little more, though still he had numerous forerunners, was the introduction—by way of contrast, to enforce his meaning, or for other reasons—of distinctly vernacular phrases, "I am of the shoemaker's mind who careth not so the shoe hold the plucking on." Such phrases, as we noted, are not uncommon in Ascham himself; but they are much more frequent in Lyly, who in this respect is as Ascham and Latimer rolled into one. To which head may be added his practice in alliteration—a common one, as again we have seen, at the time—but in him far commoner, and far more of a deliberate artifice of style than with most.

Its vernacularity.

Yet here again we may say that had there been nothing else than this in *Euphues*, it had never attained the position it held, and after a long period of eclipse now again holds. Its real differentia, its real *quality*, lies elsewhere, and under a third head, that of the extraordinary similes drawn from all heaven and earth, but especially from the fanciful zoology of the Middle Ages, which it is hardly possible to open two pages of *Euphues* without discovering in greater or less abundance.

Its unnatural history.

The usual efforts have been made to show that this curious and salient feature is not entirely original, and may be found before Lyly. No doubt it may; no doubt any feature of any writer, except the last and highest strokes of the individual genius, may so be found, while even these strokes are sometimes only the result of slight changes on precedent matter. It is quite legitimate, if not supremely important, to indicate, in this writer and in that of the third quarter of the century, the symptoms which are premonitory of every literary change, and therefore of this. But what entitles writers to a conspicuous place in the story of literature is their use for the first time on a large scale, and with striking effect, of certain means to attain certain ends. Lyly was undoubtedly the first to lavish this peculiar kind of simile and illustration, especially with the definite end of heightening and variegating his style, so as to produce on the reader a distinct rhetorical effect, to make the common uncommon, to produce style in and for itself, manner independent of matter. Before

Lyly, as we have seen, there had hardly been any one of whom this could be said, except Fisher, and Fisher's means were as different from Lyly's as was his aim.

We do not know that Lyly deliberately and consciously set himself against the principles which Ascham and his set had enunciated thirty years earlier, and which they or others had faithfully carried out; but that the opposition was in effect diametrical is certain. "Inkhorn terms" were no longer tabooed; the ambition to say things in a manner different from that of other people was not only not discouraged, but was distinctly and definitely encouraged; conceit, quaintness, individuality, were reintroduced into literature. The whole bulk of the pamphlet prose to which we shall come presently, expressed the understanding of this, which Lyly's juniors at once manifested.

Meanwhile a contemporary of Lyly's was bringing the plainer style itself to a perfection which in this particular stage was the highest it ever reached, and which showed that in competent hands it need not lack a sober grace, almost beyond that which ornater orderings could attain. Richard Hooker was a native of Heavitree, a suburb of Exeter, and had been born in 1554 in poor conditions. He had, however, forebears and living relations better off, and his uncle, John Hooker, was an Oxford man, a continuator of Holinshed, and a person of consequence under the Elizabethan reconquest of Ireland. He is said to have recommended his nephew to Bishop Jewel, and Jewel assisted Hooker to go to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, procured him private pupils, and though he himself died when Hooker had not nearly completed his Oxford course, was the cause of his becoming first Scholar and then Fellow of his college, and Reader in Hebrew in the University. He married very foolishly, and was henpecked; but his friends were stanch to him, and he obtained first the living of Drayton Beauchamp in Buckinghamshire, then the Mastership of the Temple in 1584, then the living of Boscombe in 1591, and lastly that of Bishopsbourne in Kent, where he died in 1600. At the Temple he had become involved in an equally unsought and unseemly controversy with his subordinate, the Lecturer, Travers, a bitter Puritan. Hooker's views, when he was transferred once more to the quiet of the country, took form in the great treatise called the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*,[1] of which the first five books, as it now stands, are certainly genuine, while as to the last three it is as certain that they do not appear as he wrote them, but not quite certain how far there was intentional garbling in the arrangement of their present form.

Hooker.

[1] Ed. Keble.

We are here concerned with only one side of this great Apologia for the Anglican Church, which, written while the spirit and intentions of those who presided over its transformation were well known, has an authority that no later work could claim, and which in the most charitable spirit, and with absolutely no bitterness of feeling, utterly ruined, from the logical and historical side, the position of the English Puritans. Long after Hooker's death they achieved a brief victory by calling in the secular arm, but Hooker's argument, and his history, remained unanswered and triumphant. We are not here further concerned with it than as a masterly piece of English prose, and in this capacity it can hardly be too highly praised. No one, speaking otherwise than at random, would give this praise unmixed. Hooker's style has the faults of its class—a classicism now timid, now unduly audacious; an unnecessary fear of vivid and vernacular expressions. But its author handles the methods and means which he has received with original genius, attaining to a really exquisite balance of sentence, to a harmony sometimes quite ineffable, adjusting his longer and shorter constructions with almost infallible art, and affording a specimen never surpassed, and hardly ever equalled since, of argument maintained on abstract and scholastic points without the slightest dulness, of ornament which is never daubed or stuck on, but arises from the proportion of the phrase, and the careful selection of the vocabulary. Had it been possible to have all prose written by Hookers, nobody need have wished to seek much further experiment. But this was clearly impossible, and the constantly broadening and varying demands of the different subjects to which prose was applied helped the tendency in the air, the mere wish for change, to bring that change about. The *Ecclesiastical Polity* is at least ten years the junior of *Euphues*, but it is its elder by as much or more in the order of style.

Contemporaries of Lyly and Hooker.

Accordingly, in the general work of the time, it is the influence of Lyly, not the influence of Hooker, that we find prevailing. The idea that Sidney intended the *Arcadia* as a protest against Euphuism has been dealt with above, and is almost beyond doubt erroneous. Sir Philip is as great a Euphuist as Euphues himself. So, though his taste was much purer and he came nearer to the stately mannerisms of the Jacobean and Caroline time than to the fantastic coxcombry of purely Elizabethan prose of the ornate kind, was Raleigh; so was the difficult and sententious, but often striking, Fulke Greville. All these were almost exact contemporaries of Hooker and Lyly (Raleigh was born in 1552), and they present, as no others could do, the union of courtly practice, gentle blood, great talents, and a competent education. If Spenser, another contemporary, shows a plainer style, we must remember first

that Spenser was a poet, and had the fuller harmony in which to express himself when he listed; secondly, that we have but one piece of prose of his of any length; and thirdly, that this piece is a sober State paper, though a very admirably written one. Historians like Camden (who, indeed, wrote chiefly in Latin) and Knolles and Daniel had also little temptation to indulge in ornateness, not to mention that Daniel, even in verse, prefers neutral tints to brilliant ones, and that Knolles (*c.* 1544-1610) belongs to a somewhat elder generation than that which we are now discussing, and, though he has a stately enough style of his own when he pleases, follows chiefly classical models. We should not expect much Euphuism, though there is some, in Philip Stubbes, the Puritan whose *Anatomy of Abuses*, a characteristic but childish work, appeared in 1583; or in an enthusiast for practical education like Richard Mulcaster. Yet this latter's *Treatise of Right Writing of the English Tongue*, 1582, is quite to our purpose in subject if not in style. Mulcaster, an Eton boy, a member both of King's College, Cambridge, and of Christ Church at Oxford, Master of Merchant Taylors' School in 1561, High Master of St. Paul's from 1596 to within three years of his death in 1611, and Prebendary of Salisbury, is an interesting person, and was an admirable schoolmaster for the time, holding as he did a firm belief in the virtues of the classics for study, and in those of English for practice. But he was not himself a great man of letters, and he had not reached the promised land of English prose style to which he cheered others on.[1]

Still, it is not an exaggeration to say that when a man of this period and generation does endeavour at style, it is much more probable that his attempt will take the form of ornateness, whether in the smaller or in the larger sense of Euphuism, than that it will aim at the simpler graces of strict proportion and cadence. And this is specially to be observed in some groups of prose writers, who may be best noticed here, postponing to the next Book some further comment on some of the works glanced at in the last paragraph, which belong to the very latest years of the Queen, or to years later still. These are the translators and the pamphleteers, to whom the critics, as closely connected with both, may be usefully appended.

The importance of the Elizabethan translators had never been

[1] Raleigh and others will have further notice. The chief pieces of Greville's prose (see Grosart's edition of his works, 4 vols. 1870) are his *Life* (which is not a life) *of Sidney*, for matter, and his *Letter to a Lady*, for thought and style. The late Mr. R. H. Quick, an enthusiast for education, printed (London, 1888) Mulcaster's *Positions*, dealing with that subject, but not the other treatise, entitled also, with a pleasant quaintness, *The First Part of the Elementary*. Richard Knolles's *History of the Turks* appeared in 1603, with subsequent editions in 1610 and 1621, which are not difficult to obtain.

wholly neglected, owing to their connection with Shakespeare; but it is only recently that it has been fully recognised and the texts themselves brought anew to general knowledge.[1] We have seen that from almost the earliest mediæval times to some extent, and more fully as the centuries passed by, each generation endeavoured to familiarise itself with at least some of the great writers of antiquity, as well as with those modern books, chiefly in French but latterly in other tongues also, which supplied important literature. During the time, however, while English was simply in the making, it had more to receive than to give, and Caxton's naïve and delightful admiration of the "fair language of French" is only an instance of what was going on. But now an original sap was mounting through the trunk of English prose, and the results were nowhere more apparent, were perhaps nowhere more influential, than here. For a century to come North's[2] *Plutarch* and Florio's[3] *Montaigne* at least were read and re-read with an attention which few other English books (except the translation of the Bible) could command. The former, as all know, furnished Shakespeare with no small proportion of his subjects, and Shakespeare's generation, as well as at least that which followed it and another still, with their most familiar topics and instances of human conversation and political ethics. The latter helped to create the English Essay, determined to a large extent the course of English philosophy for a time, helped (not quite so fortunately) a certain ebb of the national character from romantic to sordid schemes of life, and by a cross of the French *politique* begat the English "trimmer." Nor were the minor translators in their own day and way less influential. Among these Philemon Holland, born at Chelmsford in 1552, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, a doctor of medicine and a schoolmaster at Coventry, where he died in 1637, executed rather late in his life versions of Livy, Pliny, Plutarch (the *Morals*), Suetonius, and Xenophon; Thomas Underdowne did Heliodorus and Ovid; Nicolls ventured on Thucydides, but Thucydides was beyond him; William Adlington, of

The translators.

[1] In the very handsome series of *Tudor Translations* published by Mr. Nutt and edited generally by Mr. W. E. Henley, with introductions by various hands. Florio has also been given by Mr. Waller in a very pretty little edition (6 vols. London, 1897).

[2] Sir Thomas North was of the family which became so notable later, and was second son of the first Lord North. Very little is known about him. His *Plutarch* first appeared in 1579, and he did other translations.

[3] Of Italian extraction, but born in London about 1553. He was a member of Magdalen College, Oxford, and began as early as 1578 a series of handbooks in the modern languages, of which he was a teacher. The chief is his *World of Words*, an Italian-English dictionary. He was much patronised by Elizabeth's nobility, and held places in the household of her successor. His *Montaigne* (licensed in 1599) first appeared in 1603, and he died in 1625.

University College, Oxford, took Apuleius; "R. B." Englished some Herodotus; Sir Henry Savile, the learned Provost of Eton, did Tacitus; and Angel Day wrought Longus through Amyot into the vernacular.

It will readily be understood that whatever interest these translations possess arises to hardly the smallest extent from faithful representation of the originals. Savile certainly, Holland to some degree, one or two others more or less, were scholars; but the most famous and popular of the versions were usually taken, not direct from the original, but from previous French or Italian translations, and it was hardly the object of a single one of these writers to give their author, their whole author, and nothing but their author, in rigidly classical English. Had it been so, they had been of far less interest and value to posterity. On the contrary, such community of design as is to be seen in them (and it is rather remarkable) consists in the effort to be at once as vernacular and as variegated as may be. They compress, expand, omit, or sometimes even insert, as no modern translator would dare to do; they exhibit to the very fullest the double tendency of Euphuism to the finest and the most familiar expressions; and following in this respect Lord Berners, if not earlier translators, they put English dresses on foreign words and terms in a way infinitely delightful and full of refreshment to the tongue, but such as would make our modern purists stare and gasp. To this day these translations are a repertory of slang that still exists, of racy but obsolete expressions which would else be lost, of Latinisms, Gallicisms—isms of every kind. No class of work is fuller of that most English of all idioms, the turning of any noun, adjective or substantive, into a verb. They had, no doubt, little idea of proportion, choice, grace; but these were not the things the language needed at the time. It wanted to be thoroughly suppled, thoroughly vernacularised, and at the same time to be charged with store of good words, native and foreign, classical and modern, from which a standard vocabulary could be, as it was, riddled out afterwards. The late fourteenth and the fifteenth century writers had done their part in teaching English prose "to go"; Fisher and the Ascham school had given it a thorough grammar-school education. But these writers and others of Elizabeth's time were putting it to the university, practising it in all sports and arts at once, allowing it, it may be, rather a full allowance of wild oats, but enriching it, exercising it, giving it possessions, memories, experience; preparing it for its future business in a fashion as necessary as the more orderly and sedate processes of training which it had previously undergone.

Their characteristics.

Exactly the same drift and tendency, though in more original matter, is shown by the curious and interesting range of pamphlet

literature which, connected very directly in point of authorship with the group of University Wits, fills the last twenty years of Elizabeth, and extends into those of James and even Charles. This touches all, or almost all, varieties of subject with a universality which comes not so very far short of the modern newspaper; while in some of its developments may be found a stage—a far-off and rudimentary one, it is true—of the great change which converted the romance into the modern novel. These pamphlets[1]—a form of publication which could hardly have come into being without the printing press, and which the printing press was almost certain to bring about—had been in their earliest shape either devoted to the controversies of the Reformation, or else shortened chap-book versions of mediæval literature, romances in verse and in prose, jests, books of saws and instances. The sharp discipline of the Tudor Queen made the religious pamphlet a probable, and the political one an almost certain, short way to the gallows, or at least the whipping-post and chopping-block, so it was little cultivated.

The pamphleteers.

Yet one famous outbreak, that of the Martin Marprelate controversy, defied, though only for a time, these preventive checks. It concerned (as indeed the pseudonym of the various writers on the aggressive side confesses) the anti-prelatical movement in England, but was from the first strongly coloured by, and at last became almost wholly merged in, the flood of personal reviling which, to the great discredit of the Reformers, they had been the first to let loose. The defenders of orthodoxy and authority included some grave churchmen and more irresponsible men of letters, whom a not erring instinct told that Puritanism was as much the foe of literature as of loyalty and order in religion and politics. Lyly, Nash, and the Harveys almost or quite to a certainty took part in it, and their lampoons, as well as some at least of those of their antagonists, display the revel and riot of words which has been indicated above at its very wildest.

Martin Marprelate.

This, however, was only an episode in the pamphlet history; and it was quickly stopped.[2] The pamphlet itself persevered in less

[1] Until recently most of them were inaccessible except in large libraries, and even now they are best found in the privately printed issues of Dr. Grosart. His "Huth Library" contains Greene, Nash, Dekker, Harvey, and his "Chertsey Worthies" the enormous work of Nicholas Breton. The Marprelate tracts were printed half a century ago by the bookseller Petheram, and some more recently, with an invaluable account of the whole controversy, by Mr. Arber, whose *English Garner* contains a great number of scattered pamphlets. Lodge has been given by the Hunterian Club.

[2] I may be permitted to refer the reader who wishes for more on "Martin" and the pamphlets generally to my separate history of *Elizabethan Literature*, pp. 223-252. These byways of history are almost closed to the general historian; at least he strays if he pursues them too far.

dangerous forms—novels, generally of a strongly Euphuist tinge; personal reminiscences, true or feigned; disquisitions serious or comic, not very different, allowing for the time, from those of the Addisonian Essay; a very curious batch of sketches of the manners, especially the lower and looser manners, of the capital; and lastly, literary criticism. In all these respects except the last, Robert Greene (see last chapter) was the most prolific, and on the whole the most gifted. His short Euphuist stories, often diversified by scraps of verse, not merely furnished subjects to Shakespeare and others, but undoubtedly helped to foster in readers a taste for imaginative fiction. His personal sketches are among the earliest of literary autobiographies, though they have to be taken with rather numerous grains of salt. Above all, his series on "coney-catching" ("rooking," card-sharping, etc.), though again not to be taken too literally, is a most amusing and, with caution, instructive collection, and continued as it was by Dekker in the next generation, gives us a panorama of the shady side of London life for nearly half a century. Nash, with less romantic gift than Greene, and with no poetical power, yet achieved in *Jack Wilton, or the Unfortunate Traveller*, a novel of merit, which "coney-catched" many generations as to the loves of Surrey and "Geraldine," and besides his "Marprelate" contributions, perhaps in consequence of them, engaged in a furious paper war, the other party to which was Gabriel Harvey. Later, Nash, like others, wrote repentant and pious pamphlets. Perhaps, except in bulk, Lodge is even the superior of Greene, in respect of the romantic tone of his prose and the exquisite lyric touch of the verse with which it is strewn; while the enormous pamphlet work of Nicholas Breton, a step-son of Gascoigne and a voluminous writer in prose and verse, belongs, as does that of Dekker, rather to the next period than to this.[1]

Lodge, however, will bring us conveniently to the critics of whom he was one, and who were very often the same persons just mentioned, engaged for the moment in literary controversies. The most important of these controversies were the Puritan attack on plays and poetry generally, which was opened by the *School of Abuse* of Stephen Gosson (*vide supra*), and the other, longer, and more important controversy, first between metrical forms exactly corresponding to those of the classics, and then between rhymeless rhythms adjusted more intelligently to the genius of

The critics.

[1] The titles of these pamphlets play a great part in them—those of the "Marprelate" set having a Rabelaisian extravagance, and often a wonderful length; others abounding in favourite Elizabethan catchwords and word-plays, like that on "Will" and "Wit"; and the more romantic pieces attaining great prettiness, as in Lodge's *A Margarite of America.*

English. The earlier stage of this is best represented by the *Four Letters* of Spenser and Harvey, the later by Campion and Daniel.

The little book of William Webbe, and the much larger one attributed to George Puttenham, both,[1] especially the former, show the influence of the first part of this craze. The almost unknown William Webbe, who is thought to have been a member of St. John's College, Cambridge, and who appears to have been tutor to the sons of an Essex squire named Sulyard, published his *Discourse of English Poetrie* in 1586. It contains enthusiastic praise of Spenser, "the new poet," "our late famous English poet who wrote the *Shepherd's Calendar*," refers a good deal to the ancients, and rather superficially to the English poets, "scorns and spews out the ragged rout of our rakehelly rhymers—for so themselves use to hunt the letter," as "E. K.," for self or partner, had done before it, gives us some very comical hexameters for the two first eclogues of Virgil, and with more zeal than discretion turns Spenser's "Ye dainty nymphs" into a slipshod sort of slovenly Sapphics. But Webbe's enthusiasm is pleasing, and his style typical. Puttenham, if he was the author of the *Art of English Poesie* which appeared in 1589, was more cautious about the new mania. His volume, which is of some length, is a rather orderly treatise on Poetics and Rhetoric mixed as commonly, divided into three books, the first of Poets and Poesie, the second of Proportion, and the third of Ornament —this last being almost entirely devoted to a very full list of the Figures of Speech. In dealing with proportion he does not disdain the fancy shapes—pyramids, etc.—which aroused the anger of Addison. As may be guessed from this, Puttenham, who quotes his own verse freely and seems to have written it fairly in the stiffer manner of the first half of the reign, is rather a formalist, but his judgment, when he can get it out of stays, is not contemptible. The book is very full, learned, and careful, the work of a scholar and a gentleman, and far exceeding in detail and scope anything of the kind that was written for ages afterwards.

[1] Both in Mr. Arber's *Reprints*. But the documents of the whole subject have now been made accessible in a standard edition by Mr. Gregory Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (2 vols. Oxford, 1904).

INTERCHAPTER V

ATTENTION has often been drawn to the ambiguity of the title Elizabethan Literature, as commonly used. "Is it not," they say, "absurd to include under such a head the work of men who, like Milton and Browne, were not born till after the Queen's death, and did not die till the last quarter of the seventeenth century had arrived or was at the door?" "Is it not even the fact that most of the masterpieces of this literature were not produced at all till the reign of James?" It is desirable to remember these facts; but it is still more desirable to remember the others, first that all the seed of the whole period called Elizabethan was sown, and that not a little of it had come up, before the Queen's death; and secondly, that the quality of the period 1580-1660 is essentially one and indivisible. There are differences between Milton and Spenser, but they are differences rather of degree than of kind. The differences between Milton and Dryden are differences at least of species, almost of genus.

Our present arrangement has the advantage of keeping both sets of facts in view, and in especial of directing attention to the characteristics of the first generation of the period, the generation which, as typified by Spenser, ended a little before the last evil days of Elizabeth's own life closed. It is perfectly true that among the completed work of this time we find but one name, that of Spenser himself, which represents, undoubtedly and unquestionably, a star of the first magnitude and the widest orbit, and that perhaps two others, Marlowe and Hooker, are the only companions that can be assigned to him by a criticism which unites exactness with liberality. But it is not at all necessary to take refuge from this fact in another, the fact that, in the last date at least of the time, we have the wonderful beginnings of Shakespeare in drama, of Bacon in prose, of Donne and others in pure poetry. There is a third aspect under which the period requires no allowance, no compensation of any kind, and which enables it to stand on the credit of its own capital and revenue. It is this aspect too, which makes it peculiarly desirable to mark it off distinctly, though not too sharply, from its successor. It was the period

of the remaking, in different degrees for the different departments, but in all of the remaking, and in one practically of the making, of English Literature.

This process is most definitely and clearly mapped out in regard to Poetry. If the facts of the foregoing Books and the concentrated lessons of their Interchapters have been followed, the necessity for the remaking will here need little enforcement. Chaucer had gathered up all the stuff and all the methods of mediæval work in English verse, had added much of his own, and had left poetry in a stage of relative perfection. But the succession failed. Even men who were of more than man's estate at the time of his death, like Lydgate and Occleve, could not manage what he left them; and changes, obscure in process but obvious in kind and in result, increased the difficulty for their successors. Nor were Wyatt and Surrey in a position to undertake the reshaping with a view to the future not the past. Both had genius, but it was genius rather fine than strong: both were short-lived; and both came a little too early for their task. Nor did they for a long time find any seconds, and perhaps it was just as well. The obscure alterations of constitution, the changes of life, had to complete themselves before the new poetry could come. Then "the new poet" brought it.

On the whole, what Spenser did has been rather under- than over-valued, and his greatness only depends in part, and hardly the largest part, on the personal opinion which this or that reader may form of the poetical merit even of the *Faërie Queene*. It may be, as some think, a venerable and in parts beautiful but tedious and out-of-date allegory, or it may be, as others think, by far the greatest long poem in English. It may be anything between these two estimates. But the æsthetic variation has no place in the clear verdict of history. It is indisputable (which is not the same thing as being undisputed) that Spenser practically created the diction and prosody of English poetry as both have subsisted in the main to the present day. He did not, of course, finish the creation. Shakespeare had to come, and Milton, at least, before that was done; but he did a great deal more than begin it. His versification had to receive not a little extension, and an infinite process—a process not yet ended—of permutations and combinations, but it has not to the present day undergone any fundamental change. His diction—correctly but short-sightedly condemned by Ben as "no language"—was in fact a bold recognition of the fact that merely the current language of the day or any common day can never be the diction of poetry, that poetry needs a diction cunningly and carefully, but always to a greater or less extent, alienated, refined, *distinguished* from the diction of prose. The enormous dead-lift which he gave to poetry, and the

results of which were apparent in the ten last years of his life, and the fifty or more following it, was only in very small part due to direct imitation of his own work as such. It was due, even in the hands of Shakespeare, even in the hands of Milton, to the fact that Shakespeare first and Milton afterwards had in their hands the stock of language, the plant of prosody, which Spenser had first founded and set going. The kinds of sonnet and of satire, of history-poem and poem-philosophical which sprang up so abundantly in his footsteps are interesting, but they are not really so interesting to history as this complete reorganisation of the poet's material and of his means, as this remaking of English verse.

The position of the age in prose is hardly less important, though its achievement is much less decided. No single prose-writer of the time, not even Hooker, holds the same rank in prose that Spenser holds in poetry; perhaps, indeed, no single writer, not even Dryden, ever has held that rank. For prose, the lower and less intense harmony, is the more varied and indefinitely adjustable instrument. And while it is conceivable that one man—indeed Shakespeare has very nearly done so—should catch up and utter in hint and intimation at least, the whole sum of poetry, no one could do the like in prose. Here, too, the comparative newness of the form had its inevitable effect; even the period of sheer experiment and exploration was not over when the sixteenth century ended.

Very great advances had been made in both, and, above all, the *antinomy* of prose, the opposition of the plain and ornate styles which was to dominate the rest of its history, was for the first time clearly posed and definitely worked out on either side. This could not have happened in the earlier period of mere or main translation as regards subject, of tentative accumulation of vocabulary and experimental adaptation of arrangement. Vestiges, or rather rudiments, of the antinomy would, of course, appear encouraged by nature of subject or temperament of writer. A Chaucer translating the metres of Boethius about the motion of the heavens was not likely to write like a Capgrave in his chronicle. But the opposition was accidental and rudimentary first of all. Not till the weariness of the "aureate" diction of the fifteenth century—itself shown chiefly in verse—led the Cambridge school to denounce ink-horn terms, and combined with their worship of the classics to devise a plain classical style, could the inevitable revolt and rebound array itself definitely with a purpose, a programme, a creed, and become, first in the hands of Lyly and his followers, a striking grotesque, and then in those of Bacon and the great seventeenth-century writers, a magnificent resurrection of rhetoric in a far more glorious form than she had ever known. But at any rate the quarrel was at last fairly put, the "dependency" distinctly established.

Henceforward the ebb and flow of prose style has reigned with only superficial change for three centuries, alternately seeking the correct and simple or the out-of-the-way and gorgeous as ideals, and falling into the tame or vulgar, the extravagant or gaudy, as excesses.

In Drama, the third division, which deserves to be kept apart from poetry and prose, not only because it indifferently applies the form of both, but because by its importation of speech and action it introduces elements not strictly appropriate to either, the importance of the time has commonly seemed greatest of all. It is certainly somewhat different in nature. Here we have neither a reconstruction and recovery in greater and more promising form of a state formerly reached and then lost, as in poetry; nor a comparatively orderly extension of a campaign not yet crowned with complete victory, as in prose. But we most certainly have the sudden shaking together into their right places of elements which hitherto have been loosely whirling like the Lucretian atoms; and it is at least arguable that we have the attainment of a final form. At any rate three entire centuries have failed to produce any new really fertile cross, or to import, in conditions suitable to the climate, any foreign form capable of standing comparison with that Elizabethan play, which shook itself into shape, a hundred minor hands besides those of Marlowe and Shakespeare aiding, by the date of the production of *Every Man in his Humour*.

Much as has been written about this play, it has perhaps been insufficiently recognised that its idea, whether the matter be tragical or comical, whether it keep these kinds apart or mix them as ingeniously as in the famous classification of *Hamlet*, is essentially the same—to wit, that the play shall be a piece of life, rendered as faithfully and separately as possible, with all its divagations, its interludes, its inconsistencies, its interruptions. This is, of course, diametrically opposed to the classical theory, and to the theory of almost every modern drama except the Spanish, even to a certain extent of that. Aristotle's at first sight odd, but, whether right or wrong, all-important comparison of a play to an animal[1] helps us, perhaps better than anything, to understand the difference. Nothing that is not vitally connected with the animal—with the central notion of the play itself—must appear; the Unities (not in their absurd seventeenth-century caricature, but in their actual Greek limitation) follow naturally; second plots are impossible, for two-natured is no nature. We may have intensity and accomplishment; but, above all, we must have limit.

The Elizabethan idea is far more ambitious and grand, even if

[1] I am aware that some of the latest authorities take ζῷον in the sense of "picture," but I cannot agree with them, at least for an exclusive explanation.

doomed to fail in all but the strongest hands. The poet does not attempt to isolate action or situation merely; his play is but a piece of the life of the actors—their life is but a piece of larger and ever larger lives. Nothing is superfluous, irrelevant, common, unclean; everything may and shall go in. The intenser nature of the interests of tragedy may give to the working of tragic plays a closer unity than that of comic; the majesty or the pathos of some particular character may dwarf in presentation as in attention the episodes and the interludes. But the principle is always the same. The touch with the actual is never loosed, the farrago of the play is the farrago of life.

It is the just and abiding glory of Marlowe that, so far as one man could, he really seems to have hit, consciously or not, on this vast conception, and that he certainly perfected, or went far to perfect, the only instrument of verse that could possibly serve as a medium of execution for it. But his own plays as plays are after all only the most magnificent of failures, and without a Shakespeare the possibility of the thing could never have been shown. Whether the possibility of it has ever been fully shown except by Shakespeare is a point on which it would be partly irrelevant and wholly anticipatory to dwell here.

That the mere form of play which was strong enough and elastic enough to give shape to this mighty attempt developed itself out of the beggarly elements of the mystery and interlude, with the undoubted but only partial help and crossing of the classical drama, has been, I hope, shown, with less violence to fact and probability than other theories require. But it can never be denied that the transformation is astonishing. It was not so rapid, nor does it display such individual power of genius, as that which in a single man's hands evolved the relatively perfect poetical work of Chaucer from the interesting but in no single case perfect experiments of the hundred and fifty years before him. More than a generation had to pass, a vast company of men, unknown, half-known, and known, had to be continuously at work, before the childish puppet-plays—comparatively speaking—of Udall and Sackville and Still passed into the completed work of Shakespeare. But as the process was slower, so the result was more sure. Chaucer's work, as we have seen, found no following except in a half-foreign country, and from men who were themselves unable to hand on the art in living condition. The thirty years of experiment in drama, from 1560 to 1590, were succeeded by fifty more of the most abundant, varied, vigorous, and, for the best of the time, brilliant production that any literary form has ever enjoyed.

BOOK VI

LATER ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

SHAKESPEARE

The luck of Jacobean literature—Concentration of the great drama in it—Shakespearian chronology—The life—The work—The poems—The *Sonnets*—Their formal and spiritual supremacy—Probable divisions of plays: the earlier—Their verse and phrase—Their construction—Their characters—The middle division: the *Merry Wives*—The Romantic comedies—The great tragedies, Roman and Romantic—Last plays—Doubtful plays.

It will have been seen already with what large cautions and provisos the familiar term Elizabethan Literature has to be taken. The phenomenon to which we apply it took its rise within the reign of the Queen, or—if we take that rise to be manifested by the publication and appreciation of the *Songs and Sonnets*—on the latest eve of that reign. But it grew very slowly. More than twenty years passed before anything really striking and decisive either in prose or poetry appeared; nearly thirty before really characteristic and original drama emerged, and then not by any means completely, from the condition of experiment. Even after *Euphues* and the *Shepherd's Calendar* had distinctly foretold great things in the two ordinary harmonies, another ten or fifteen years' schooling had to be undergone before the general time of production was reached. And the greatest work of all, putting Spenser, Hooker, and Marlowe aside, was mostly borne, though as *non sua poma*, by the reign of James.

The luck of Jacobean literature.

Despite the extreme uncertainty of Shakespearian chronology, we do know that a considerable part of Shakespeare's work was done

before 1603. But certainly the best part was not. Very little of Jonson antedates the Queen's death; the meagre bundles of notes, interesting and pregnant as they are, which constitute the first edition of Bacon's *Essays*, would, had they never been augmented, have given us no idea whatever of his real literary powers; the best work of men like Daniel and Drayton was to come. What is perhaps not more really surprising, but more startling at first sight than the slowness of the rise of this great literature, is the rapidity, in the case of its most notable and characteristic constituent, of the decline. Omitting the work of Marlowe, which was prematurely brought to a close, the early work of Shakespeare, and a little more on the farther side, with a much smaller part of that of Ford, Massinger, and others on the hither—the whole bulk of the English drama was written between 1600 and 1625. Almost the whole bulk of it that has really commanding merit was written between 1590 and 1640—periods of exactly a quarter of a century in the first case, of exactly half a century in the second. Fletcher died less than ten years after Shakespeare, and in the work of all the men who survived Fletcher decadence is apparent. There are, of course, those who would say that it is apparent in Fletcher himself, even in those works of his which, being certainly, or almost certainly, in part due to Beaumont (who died *before* Shakespeare), are contemporary with the masterpieces of the class. But this is perhaps an extravagantly rigid and arbitrary scheme of classification. It is enough to say that between 1600 and 1625 all the best of our dramatists except Marlowe were working more or less simultaneously; and that within this period all the known kinds of the great drama itself had been discovered and practised. What is more is that within this same time the great metrical effect of drama upon English poetry had been, for good, entirely accomplished, and was already beginning to turn to evil—an evil which was not limited to its own immediate form.

Concentration of the great drama in it.

Reference has already been made to the fact that an attack, on the score of plagiarism and other misdemeanours, had been made by Greene, before his death in 1592, upon a certain Shakescene, who has been naturally identified with William Shakespeare. But we do not know with any certain or satisfactory knowledge upon what work of Shakespeare's this attack was directed. All the more careful and reasonable accounts of his life and work mark the earliest play-dates, where they give them, with a tell-tale *circa*. It is only by guesses that anything is dated before the *Comedy of Errors*, at the extreme end of 1594; and the *Comedy of Errors*, unmistakably Shakespearian as it is here and

Shakespearian chronology.

there in character and versification, is so exceedingly crude both in these points and in composition generally, that the conjectural antedating of plays like *Richard III.*, and still more *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, becomes from the literary point of view almost utterly incredible. And it may not be improper to add a very earnest protest against the attempt to group plays and classes of plays according to successive supposed states of the poet's mind and temper. Where there is crudity of character, artlessness of verse, or very flagrantly chaotic composition (it must be remembered that Shakespeare's composition is not to be judged by the rules of any ancient *abbé* or modern journalist) then we may with a clear literary conscience ticket this as "probably early." Otherwise, in default of positive documentary evidence, there would not be much reason for putting *The Tempest* later than *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or *A Winter's Tale* than *Romeo and Juliet*. A poet, especially a poet like Shakespeare, is not a vegetable; you cannot count the years of his work by any real or fancied number of rings in his heart. Bad verse, inhuman character, clumsy composition—become after a time impossible to him; in temper and choice of subject he abides supreme and free.

The results of the almost ferocious industry spent upon unearthing and analysing every date and detail of Shakespeare's life are on the whole very meagre, and for literary purposes almost entirely unimportant, while with guesswork we have nothing to do. The certainties may be summarised very briefly. The life. William Shakespeare was traditionally born on the 23rd of April, and certainly baptized on the 26th of April 1564, at Stratford-on-Avon. His grandfather's name was Richard, that of his father, a dealer in hides, gloves, corn, wood, etc., was John, and the poet's mother was Mary Arden. He had two sisters and three brothers. The family, which through Mary Arden had some small landed property, was at one time prosperous, at others not. Shakespeare himself married early; the date of the actual ceremony is not known, but a bond of marriage passed between him and his wife Anne Hathaway on November 1582, when he was little more than eighteen, and his wife, a yeoman's daughter, eight years older. They had three children, Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith, and there is absolutely no documentary evidence of the slightest value as to the terms on which they lived together. Tradition there is—though of no great age, and of exceedingly slight authority—as to his leaving Stratford for London, perhaps in 1585, 1586, or 1587, and perhaps in consequence of a deer-stealing prank in the neighbouring park of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote. He perhaps began his connection with the theatre as a horse-holder; and was pretty certainly an actor before

long. In 1593 appeared his first work, the remarkable *Venus and Adonis*, and next year the rather less remarkable *Lucrece*. He was connected soon after the middle of the last decade of the century with divers theatres, became a shareholder in them, and by 1597 could buy a good house, New Place, at Stratford, where he afterwards enlarged his property. It is to be noted that his constant residence at London during these ten years, his desertion of his wife, etc., are all matters of guesswork founded on barely negative evidence. It is not in the slightest degree impossible that Anne Shakespeare was with her husband for the whole time, or that he made frequent visits home. But there are fair grounds for supposing that London was his headquarters during the decade from 1586 to 1596, his partial residence during the next, and only occasionally visited by him during the third—at the close of which, in 1616 on 23rd April, he died. The best-known detail about him perhaps, and a sample of the trivial things on which structures of gossip have been based, is his bequest of his second-best bed to his wife. Personal references to him are not numerous and rather vague, though except in the case of Greene's splenetic outburst (if it be meant for Shakespeare) always complimentary. His reputation, though it has steadily grown, has always been great; there has never from the day of his death to this day been wanting testimony to his position from the greatest living names of the time in English literature.

Shakespeare's works, in the generally accepted canon, consist of a comparatively small body of non-dramatic poems, the two pieces above mentioned, a body of 154 sonnets, and a very few shorter pieces somewhat more doubtfully genuine, on the one hand; on the other, of about twenty times as much dramatic work divided into thirty-seven plays, which in the original edition, published seven years after the owner's death by his friends Heminge and Condell (this does not contain *Pericles*), are classed as "tragedies, comedies, and histories." Before this edition, and during Shakespeare's lifetime, only a few of the plays had been printed in quartos of doubtful authenticity; the *Venus*, the *Lucrece*, and the *Sonnets* appeared with his name and pretty certainly under his superintendence. The spelling of the name varies from Shaxper to Shakespeare. But if Greene's gibe at it is good for anything, it settles the pronunciation as nearest the latter form, and this is the spelling on the title-page of the *Sonnets*, the only book of his published in his lifetime, after he was famous, and obviously with his leave if not by him.

The work.

In view of the extreme uncertainty of date of most of the plays before 1600, the certain attribution of the two larger poems to 1593-94, and of the *Sonnets* (though they were not printed till 1609) to

1598 or earlier, when they are mentioned in Meres's *Palladis Tamia*,[1] is very important and solid. These early dates, and the fact that all the three larger pieces or groups are concerned with love, show us in a more personal fashion than the scheme of the drama (always more or less impersonal, and in Shakespeare's hands extraordinarily so) what manner of man and poet Shakespeare was in his youth. The dominant tone in all three is passion, combined in the *Sonnets* with an intense and wide-sweeping thought. In some more general and obvious characteristics *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* differ little from other members of a large class of Elizabethan poems referred to above (p. 267). They select, on the pattern of many writers of the French and Italian Renaissance, subjects at once luscious and tragical, and they apply the new melodious verse, of which Spenser had taught the secret, to the discussion of them in a manner which appeals at once to the sensual and the sentimental emotions.

But if the class was the same, the individuals are very different. There were already many tuneful singers in 1593; but none of them except the master himself could raise such a pageant of voluptuous imagery, or accompany it with such a symphony of harmonious sound, as we find in *Venus and Adonis*. No one except Spenser and Sackville had evoked the rhyme-clangour of the stanza[2] with such delicate art; no one except these two had portrayed such vivid pictures as the arrest of Adonis by Venus, the captivity of Mars, the portrait of herself by the goddess, the escape of the courser, the description of the boar and of the hare-hunt, the solitary night, the discovery of the foolish youth who has fled from Love's arms to those of Death. But while none, save these, of men living had done, or could have done, such work, there was much here which—whether either could have done it or not—neither had done.

In the first place there is, almost for the first time in English poetry since Chaucer, a directness of observation in the sketches from nature. Sackville, so far as his brief space and peculiar subjects allowed him, Spenser far more, are great painters and describers. But even the later and greater poet rather displays a magnificently decorative convention in painting than a direct re-creative or reproductive touch. Shakespeare, even in these earliest days, has this latter—the horse and the hare, though the most famous and elaborate, are only two out of many instances of it in the *Venus*. In the second place, the slow movement, which is of

The poems.

[1] Meres's extremely interesting though singularly uncritical sketch of contemporary and other English literature will be found in Mr. Arber's *English Garner*, ii. 94; and in Mr. Gregory Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, as cited above.

[2] *Venus and Adonis* is in the six-, *Lucrece* in the seven-lined stave.

the essence of the poetry of Sackville and of Spenser, and which is certainly invited by the six-lined stanza in which the *Venus* is written almost as much as by the rhyme-royal and the Spenserian, cannot adjust itself to the infinite variety and the directly lyrical flow of Shakespeare's versification. It is not a mere accident which has made composers choose "Bid me discourse" and "Lo, here the gentle lark" for setting to song measures of the lightest quality; and throughout the poet shows himself—even more than Spenser, how much more then than any one else!—the absolute master of his metre, the *tregetour*, to whom all conditions of phrase and rhythm are merely *materia prima* out of which he can make whatsoever he will. And lastly, though of necessity in less measure and degree, that gift of indicating character, of opening up whole unending vistas of thought by a single phrase, which is Shakespeare's as it is hardly any one else's, is here. Of Adonis, the story forbade him to make much. But it would have been so easy to make Venus contemptible or disgusting or simply tedious; and she escapes all three fates so completely! The escape, no doubt, is effected partly, if not mainly, by the unfailing intensity of passion which the poet suffuses, but we are concerned chiefly with the means of suffusion. They are, I take it, mainly, if not wholly, comprised in that magic of the single phrase in which Shakespeare (for this is not Spenser's gift) reminds us of no predecessor but Chaucer, and in which he outdoes Chaucer more than Chaucer outdoes others.

> Ten kisses short as one, one long as twenty—
> Leading him prisoner in a red-rose chain—
> Love is a spirit all compact of fire—
> He sees her coming and begins to glow
> Even as a dying coal revives with wind—
> Her two blue windows faintly she upheaveth—
> Was melted like a vapour from her sight—

are mere specimens selected half at random from the things of this kind with which the piece swarms. "Conceited," "over-luscious," "unoriginal"—half a dozen other epithets the merely stop-watch critic may heap upon *Venus and Adonis*. One epithet, sometimes used in disparagement, it does deserve—it is young, but with the youth of Shakespeare.

Much of what has been said will apply to *Lucrece*, which chiefly differs from its predecessor in having a seven-line stanza, and in dealing with criminal, and not merely unhappy and tragic, passion. It is, however, on the whole, inferior; being not merely longer (and the style is not improved by length), but written with something more of an approach to the old fifteenth-century manner of allegoric and

other padding. We should be sorry not to have it as well as the *Venus*, but it could not supply its companion's place.

The *Sonnets* do not reveal to us a more exquisite or richly gifted poet than does the *Venus;* but they take us to a higher range of subject, where sensuous imagery is indeed not absent, but where the poet's absorption in it has given way to a more direct domination of the ideal, to meditation upon passion rather than realisation of it. The endless discussions on the personages probably or possibly concerned must be sought elsewhere. The famous dedication [1] is, almost to a certainty, enigmatic of malice prepense; but there is no reason to question the fact suggested by the text throughout, and explicitly asserted once in it, that "a man right fair" and "a woman coloured ill" were the objects, either successive or simultaneous, of the poet's passionate attachment. That these two persons were live individual beings; that the passion was actually felt, but for one, two, five, or fifty other persons quite different from those adumbrated; or that the poems have no necessary connection with any particular person, will never be exclusively asserted or denied by any one acquainted with human nature.

The *Sonnets*.

All these theories and others are possible; none is proved; and, for the literary purpose, none is really important. What is important is that Shakespeare has here caught up the sum of love and uttered it as no poet has before or since, and that in so doing he carried poetry—that is to say, the passionate expression in verse of the sensual and intellectual facts of life—to a pitch which it had never previously reached in English, and which it has never outstepped since. The coast-line of humanity must be wholly altered, the sea must change its nature, the moon must draw it in different ways, before that tide-mark is passed.

These *Sonnets* are written in the English form, which is sometimes called from them the Shakespearian, and which, as already explained, is quite entitled to claim equality with the chief Italian or Petrarchian. Three quatrains, not connected by any necessary or usual community of rhyme, are tipped with a couplet; and, generally speaking, though not invariably, the opposition or balance of octave and sestet which the Petrarchian form naturally invites is replaced here by a steady building up of the thought through the douzain, and then either a climax or a quick anti-

Their formal and spiritual supremacy.

[1] "To the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets Mr. W. H. all happiness and that eternity promised by our ever-living poet wisheth the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth. T. T." "T. T." is admitted to be Thomas Thorpe the publisher; the "ever-living poet" is open to no doubt, as the title-page has "Shakespeare's Sonnets." But who "Mr. W. H." was, that is the question. It matters extremely little, but general opinion and fair probability incline to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, Sidney's nephew.

strophe in the final couplet. The form is extraordinarily suitable to the subjects, and may be said to be, for the sonnet meditative, actually preferable to the octave-and-sestet, though the latter may have advantages for the sonnet descriptive. No such samples of the peculiar phrase beauty of the *Sonnets* can be given as those which were possible in the case of the *Venus*, simply because of their bewildering abundance. Every sonnet, and perhaps a majority of the two thousand lines or thereabouts, contains them ; and among them are numbered no small proportion of the highest, the intensest, the most exquisite jewels of English poetry. But their general characteristic as verse is a steady soaring music, now lower, now higher, never exactly glad but always passionate and full, which can be found nowhere else—a harmonic of mighty heart-throbs and brain-pulsings which, once caught, never deserts the mind's ear. Like all the greatest poetry, this is almost independent of meaning though so full of it ; you can attend to the sense or disregard it as you please, certain in each case of satisfaction. The thoughts are not so far-fetched, the music not quite so unearthly, as in some poems of the next generation, but they are more universal, more commanding, more human. The mastery which had been partially attained in *Venus and Adonis* is complete here. There is nothing that the poet wishes to say that he cannot say, and there is hardly a district of thought and feeling into which he does not at least cast glances of unerring vision.

The faculty, which in this direction attained such early command, seems in the more complex and various departments of dramatic exercise to have developed itself, as might be expected, more slowly in proportion to the bulk and variety of its accomplishment. What really is Shakespeare's earliest dramatic work is, as has been said, in the highest degree uncertain ; and of the pieces which are with more or less probability ascribed to his earliest period it is not definitely known how much is his own, how much supplied by or borrowed from others. From the beginning of the play, as distinguished from the interlude, the habit seems to have established itself, in England as in other countries, of constantly reworking old pieces by new hands ; and it is probably to some exceptional popularity of Shakespeare as a refashioner in this way that Greene's outburst refers. His early pieces, then, may be divided into anticipations, more or less original, of his special masterpiece, the romantic comedy, attempts in the blood-and-thunder melodrama of the time, and probably, in most cases, refashioned chronicle-plays or "histories," a kind, as we have seen, as old as Bale. To the first division belong *Love's Labour's Lost*, the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the *Comedy of Errors* (this touching the translated classical play), *Measure for Measure* (?), the series culminat-

Probable divisions of plays : the earlier.

ing in *A Midsummer Night's Dream;* to the second *Titus Andronicus;* to the last the majority of the great series of the English histories, while *Romeo and Juliet* stands apart as what we may call a romantic tragedy corresponding to the romantic comedy, and promising almost greater things to come.

In all this work, guessing as little as we can, and proceeding as gingerly as possible, we can see the poet's genius growing and settling itself in every possible way. In metre he begins with the lumbering fourteeners, not as yet quite spirited up even by him, the stiff blank verse which even from the first becomes pliant in his hand, the richer but almost stiffer Marlovian hectoring style, the quaint fantasies and euphuistic devices of Lyly, all frequently lapsing into rhymed couplet and even stanza. But almost from the very first there are glimpses, and very soon there are much more than glimpses, of something that we have never seen before. Such a phrase, for instance, to take but the first that occurs, as the

Their verse and phrase.

> And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
> From this world-wearied flesh,

of *Romeo and Juliet* takes us a long way beyond Marlowe, a longer way beyond Peele. In both these masters there is a deficiency of vibration in the verse, and a certain poverty, or at least simplicity, of verbal music. "Native wood-notes wild" is rather truer of Peele than of Shakespeare. Even Shakespeare could not often outdo Marlowe in a sort of economy of majesty, the grandeur of a huge blank cliff-face, or of the empty welkin itself. But as his meaning is more complex, farther-ranging, more intricately developed than theirs, so are his versification and his form. The incomparable skill that was to achieve such things as

> Peace, peace!
> Dost thou not see my baby at my breast
> That sucks the nurse asleep?

or the famous *Tempest* passage about "such stuff as dreams are made on," confronts us in the making (and a very rapid making) quite early. We find it in the quaint euphuisms of *Love's Labour's Lost*, in the unequal speeches of the *Two Gentlemen*, even in such a partly farcical medley as the *Comedy of Errors*, and such an ill-mingled mass of farce and tragedy as *Measure for Measure*. The real Shakespeare cannot help showing himself, if only by a flash of verse here and there; and then we are in presence of something new—of a kind of English poetry that no one has hit upon before, and which, as we cannot but feel, is revolutionising the whole

structure and character of English verse. He may rhyme, or he may not rhyme, or he may turn to prose; but always there is the new phrase, the new language, conceited to the despair of pedants, playing on words in a fashion maddening to dullards, not always impeccable from the stricter standpoints of taste, but always instinct with creative genius.

Their construction.

In respect of construction and dramatic conception these early works, as we might expect, are less advanced. The chronicle-play of its nature defies construction of the ordinary kind, though sometimes, as in Marlowe's *Edward II.* and Shakespeare's two *Richards*, the actual story may be short and central enough to give something like definite plot. It is, however, remarkable how Shakespeare contrives to infuse into these chronicles, or, as they may be not inaccurately termed, these dramatic romances, something of the unity of the regular play or dramatic epic. He will do it by the most various means—sometimes as in *King John*, by the contrasted attraction of the tragedy of Constance and Arthur and the comedy of the Bastard Falconbridge; sometimes, as in *Henry IV.*, by the inclusion of a non-historical character, like Falstaff, of the very first interest and importance, with the subsidiaries necessary to set it off; sometimes, as in *Henry V.*, by projecting an idea (in this case the patriotic idea of England) in such a fashion that the whole of the play, humours and all, imposes it on the spectator. But in the miscellaneous plays there is much less unity of construction, and, as yet, the romantic attraction of character is not quite secured. The defeat of the project of seclusion from womankind in *Love's Labour's Lost* might hardly, in any case, have been sufficient by itself, and is certainly not made sufficient; the play, agreeable as it is, loses itself in humours, and episodes, and single combats of wit and love. The central story of the *Two Gentlemen* is not more than enough for an ordinary *nouvelle*, and it may be questioned whether that of *Romeo and Juliet* is in itself much more. But this latter is quintessenced, and exalted to the heavens, by the pure and intense poetic quality of its verse, by the pity of it in the case of the hero and still more the heroine, and by the contrasted flashes of wit and gallantry in Mercutio and Tybalt and the rest. So in the other and lighter masterpiece, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which probably belongs to this period, the subtle fidelity to the dream-nature perhaps makes it unnecessary to give, but certainly as a matter of fact excludes, any elaborate character-drawing. Indeed, always and everywhere at this period, Shakespeare's character is far ahead of his plot. Some indeed, to whom critical adhesion can here by no means be given, would maintain that this was always the case, and that to the very last the dazzling

and transcendent truth and mastery of the great personages help to blind the reader to the want of that "clockwork" excellence of construction which Jonson could perhaps already give, and was certainly to give before Shakespeare's death. Let it rather be said that Shakespeare at this time had not quite acquired the art of constructing up to his character-level; that later, when he had learnt it, he never cared to give more construction than was necessary for his characters; and that in this he was right. It may be questioned—heresy as the statement will seem to some—whether construction, pitched to the perfection of *The Silent Woman* or of *Tom Jones*, is not something of a *tour de force*, and whether it does not deserve Bacon's pleasant sneer in another matter, "you may see as good sights in tarts." Life does not consider or contrive so curiously. However this may be, Shakespeare at this time was certainly not "our best plotter"; he was already at times an almost perfect artist in character, as he was a quite perfect poet. Even in such "more rawer" work as the *Two Gentlemen*, "Who is Silvia?" does not more show us the master of lyric than Julia and Lance show us the master of the graver and the lighter, the more passionate and the more frivolous, psychology and ethology. Even in that unequal medley, *Measure for Measure*, the great scene between Isabel and Claudio so far transcends anything that English, anything that European, drama had had to show for nearly two thousand years, that in this special point of view it remains perhaps the most wonderful in Shakespeare. Marlowe has nothing like it; his greatest passages, psychologically speaking, are always monologues; he cannot even attempt the clash and play of soul with soul that is so miraculously given here. Yet, though the play (which some call a comedy!) is not known to have been acted till 1604, its general characteristics put it far earlier.

Their characters.

The second or middle division of plays may be said to be connected with the first by the link between *Henry IV.* and *Henry V.*,[1] the latest and most matured of the early batch, and the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, probably the first of the second. The *Merry Wives* itself is a curious study. It has failed to find favour with some, owing to a not ignoble dislike at seeing the degradation or discomfiture of Falstaff, but it must be remembered that Shakespeare, though never cruel with the morbid cruelty of the modern pessimist, is always perfectly awake to the facts of life. And, as a matter of fact, the bowls that Falstaff played involve the rubbers that are here depicted. It has also been a

The middle division: the *Merry Wives*.

[1] It is well to say nothing about *Henry VI.*, because, though I have no doubt that this trilogy is, as we have it, in the main Shakespeare's, it is also beyond all doubt, and beyond all others, a refashioning of earlier plays.

common saying that the play is little better than a farce. If so, it can only be said that Shakespeare very happily took or made the opportunity of showing how a farce also can pass under the species of eternity. How infinitely do the most farcical of the characters, such as Sir Hugh and Dr. Caius, excel the mere "Vices" of earlier playwrights! Who but Shakespeare had—we may almost say who but Shakespeare has—made an immortal thing of a mere ass, a mere puff-ball of foolish froth like Slender? If Chaucer had had the dramatic as he had the narrative faculty and atmosphere he might have done Mrs. Quickly, who is a very near relative, in somewhat lower life, of the Wife of Bath, and rapidly ripening for her future experiences in Eastcheap. But Shallow is above even Chaucer, as are also the subtle differentiation between Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford, and the half-dozen strokes which her creator judged sufficient for sweet Anne Page. As for Falstaff, it is mistaken affection which thinks him degraded, or "translated" Bottom-fashion. He is even as elsewhere, though under an unluckier star.

This completeness exhibits itself, not perhaps in more masterly fashion, but in a somewhat higher and more varied material, in the great trio of Romantic comedies which is supposed to represent the work of the last year or two of the sixteenth century—

The Romantic comedies.

Twelfth Night, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *As You Like It*. Whether this order represents the actual composition or not, it certainly represents an intellectual and literary progression of interest and value, though the steps between the three are not wide. *Twelfth Night*, like the *Merry Wives* though not quite to the same extent, is pure comedy with a leaning to farce. The exquisite delicacy of the character of Viola suffuses it with a more romantic tone; but the disasters of Malvolio are even less serious than Falstaff's, and the great appeal of the play lies wholly on the comical side, in the immortal characters of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, in Feste, the first distinctly and peculiarly Shakespearian clown, in Maria the "youngest wren of nine," in the glorious fooling of the plot against the steward, and the minor Comedy of Errors put upon Viola and Sebastian. There is no touch of sadness, though the clown's final song of "The rain it raineth every day" gives a sort of warning note; the whole is sunny, and if less romantically imaginative than *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is almost as romantically fanciful.

Much Ado about Nothing changes us from pure comedy to the tragi-comic—indeed, to what threatens at one time to be tragedy undiluted. Perhaps here only, or here and in the *Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare has used tragedy to heighten his comedy, just as he habitually does the opposite; and the effect is good. But it is for the

lighter side—for the peerless farce of Dogberry, the almost peerless comedy proper of Benedick and Beatrice—that we love the play. And the attraction of this couple, anticipated very early in Rosaline and Biron, is used yet again and with absolutely supreme success in *As You Like It*, one of the topmost things in Shakespeare, the masterpiece of romantic comedy, one of the great type-dramas of the world. Here, as in so many other places, Shakespeare borrowed his theme, and even no small part of his minor situations; but this matters nothing. The *Tale of Gamelyn* is pleasant and vigorous; Lodge's *Rosalynde* is ingenious and fantastically artistic. But *As You Like It* is part of the little "library of La Quinte"—of the few books exhibiting imagination and expression equally married. Rosalind and Touchstone stand, each in his or her own way, alone.

The apparent change in the subject and temper of Shakespeare's work at the beginning of the seventeenth century has been the subject of much idle talk. There is no more reason to believe that he was specially and personally merry when he wrote this group of comedies, than there is to believe that he was sad or embittered during the period which produced *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*—to which some would add *Troilus and Cressida*, *Timon*, and even *Measure for Measure*, as well as *Coriolanus*. To the present writer it is pretty certain that *Measure for Measure*, *Timon*, and *Troilus and Cressida* represent much earlier work, whether or no they had been actually produced. The three Roman plays, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, make an interesting section to themselves, which in *Antony and Cleopatra* almost passes into that of romantic tragedy, and so joins the supreme quartette, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Lear*. In all the Roman plays Shakespeare applied his English-chronicle method pretty exactly to the material that he found in North's *Plutarch*, and, since his faculties both of stage-management and of versification were now in complete maturity, with the noblest effect. But in character he does not create much, he only interprets—till we come to the "Serpent of old Nile" and her lover, who are neither the crowned wanton and besotted debauchee of uninspired history, nor the anti-Roman sorceress and victim of Horace's craven-crowing ode, but a real hero and heroine of romance, luckless though not blameless, sympathetic though not ill served.

The great tragedies, Roman and Romantic.

Much, however, even of *Antony and Cleopatra* is only chronicle, and like the other two, great as they are, falls beneath the magnificent creation of the four great romantic tragedies. In each of these, of course, Shakespeare had again his authorities, and, as his wont, he sometimes followed them closely. But the interest of the four

does not depend in the very least upon Cinthio or Saxo, upon Geoffrey or Holinshed. Here, as in the great companion comedies, the dramatist breaks quite free; his real themes are human passion and human action at large, caught and embodied for the nonce in individual character and fate. Nowhere else does even Shakespeare lavish his resources as he does in these four plays, and certainly in none does he manifest such a power of displaying the irony of life and fate. Viewed from one standpoint, all four are as well entitled to the motto "Vanity of vanities" as Ecclesiastes itself. The love, the heroism, and the great leading qualities of Othello and Macbeth, the filial duty and intellectual subtlety of Hamlet, the generous if reckless and passionate *bonhomie* of Lear, all make shipwreck against the rocks thrown in their way by inauspicious stars, and sought out too often by their own mistakes and crimes. With that supreme genius which distinguishes him from the common playwright, Shakespeare has never made his heroes or heroines types; and this has puzzled many, and driven not a few to despairing efforts to make them out types after all. It is exactly what they are not. Shakespeare was no duped or duping preacher of the ruling passion like his second editor. *Othello* is indeed the simplest of the four; but even here the character of Iago, which is almost as complex as that of Hamlet, invites a great, from some the greater, part of the interest.

Those who would make Hamlet a mere irresolute, a mere Waverley, not only do not supply a full explanation of him even in their terms, but forget that irresolution, at least such as his, is the most complex of qualities. The inability of the will to "let itself go" is partly caused by, much more complicated with, the inability of the intellect to decide. To compare *Lear* with the wretched other play[1] on the subject, which is beyond all doubt anterior, or with Holinshed, or with Geoffrey's original, is perhaps the very best single means of appreciating the infinite variety and intricacy of Shakespeare's knowledge and expression of humanity. Although the hapless King is always in the Latin sense impotent — incapable of resisting the impulse of the moment — this fault of his is conditioned, coloured, transformed at every instant by circumstances, many of them Shakespeare's own invention, and all rearranged with new effects by him. The gifting, the unexpected fractiousness of Cordelia (and let it be remembered that Cordelia is not a perfect character, that she is as hyper-frank as her sisters are hypocritical), the petty insults at Goneril's, the bolder outrage at Gloster's under the orders of Regan and Cornwall, the terrors of the storm, and the talk (dangerous to already tottering wits) of the sham madman, the rescue even as it

[1] To be found, with other similar apparatus, in Hazlitt's *Shakespeare's Library*.

is too late, the second fall into the hands of his enemies, and the final blow in the murder of Cordelia—all these engines, all these reagents, the dramatist applies to Lear's headstrong petulance with the most unvarying precision of science, the most unfailing variety of art. We have the ungovernable king and ex-king in twenty different "states," in twenty different relations and presentments, all connected by the central inexorable story. And so in *Macbeth* the hero—ambitious, uxorious, intensely under the influence of nerves and of imagination, as different from the mere "butcher" of Malcolm's insult as his greater but not less complex-souled wife is from a "fiendlike queen"—passes before us whole and real, terrible but exact, before, at the crisis of, and in his criminal stage, at once with the fluttering and phantasmagoric variety of a dream, and with an utterly solid and continuous story-interest. The Macbeth who is excited by the prophecy of the witches is exactly the same Macbeth as he who shrinks from the visioned dagger, as he who is struck to a kind of numb philosophising by the cry of women that announces his wife's death.

Of the numberless and magnificent passages of our poetry which these four plays contain it were vain to attempt to speak. It must be sufficient to say that in them the Shakespearian line, which, with its absolute freedom of shifting the pause from the first syllable to the last, its almost absolute freedom of syllabic equivalence, and the infinite variety of cadence which the use of these two main means (and no doubt some magic besides) allowed it to attain, is the central fact of English poetry—this line came to its very farthest. We only observe in the plays of the last six or seven years of his life one change, and that not a quite certain one, the inclination to greater indulgence in the redundant syllable which is so exceedingly noticeable in his successors in romantic drama, Beaumont and Fletcher. It is pretty certain that this license, which he had always used to some extent, would never in his hands have reached the excess which we find in them, and which in their followers simply disbands the line into loose ungirt prose, with some reminiscences of verse here and there. But it cannot be considered on the whole an improvement.

The plays of, or probably belonging to, the last period of Shakespeare's life are fewer in proportion than those of either of the preceding periods, but those of them that are certain present interesting characteristics. These are *Cymbeline*, the *Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, the others being *Henry VIII.* and *Pericles*. This last play, which was not included in the first folio of 1623 by Shakespeare's friends and colleagues, Heminge and Condell, presents curious difficulties. Great part of it *must* be Shakespeare's; there is perhaps no part that *might* not be; and the

Last plays.

general characteristics of story-management and versification are a very odd mixture of his earliest and his latest manner—a *Love's Labour's Lost* blended with a *Winter's Tale*. Nor do I at least see reason for refusing any part of *Henry VIII.* to Shakespeare, though the prominence of the redundant syllable has made many ascribe it in large part to Fletcher. But about the other three there is no doubt, and certainly there is more excuse than usual for those who read in them a special index of the author's temper in these his last days—of the "calmed and calming *mens adepta*" whereof Fulke Greville speaks. *Cymbeline* partakes somewhat of the same character as the earlier *Much Ado about Nothing*. It is very nearly a tragedy—indeed, unlike *Much Ado about Nothing*, it contains accomplished tragic incidents in the deaths of the Queen and Cloten. But as far as the interesting personages—Imogen, Iachimo, Posthumus—are concerned, the tragedy is averted, and the whole deserves the name of romantic *drame* in the French sense.

This word, indeed, exactly describes these last three plays, and with ever-increasing appropriateness. Pedants of the bookish theoric of playwright craftsmanship have found fault with the construction of *Cymbeline*, which is admittedly loose, like its fellows—a chronicle or romance rather than an epic, but perfectly sufficient for its own object and purposes. The backbone of *A Winter's Tale* is a little more carefully and distinctly vertebrated, though no doubt the action is rather improbably prolonged, and the statue-scene, in which Hermione is restored to Leontes, does not entirely atone by its extreme beauty for its equally extreme improbability. But here, as always, Shakespeare has done what he meant to do; and here, as always, it is the extremity of critical impertinence to demand from an author not what he meant to do but something that the critic thinks he might, could, should, or ought to have meant. The vivid truth of the Queen's frank courtesy, Leontes' jealous rage (so different from Othello's, yet equally lifelike), the fine lurid presentment of the "coast" of Bohemia, the exquisitely idyllic (a word much abused, yet here applicable) figure of Perdita, the inimitable *brio* of Autolycus, the pendant to Touchstone—to give all these and other things in a pleasing series was what the dramatist intended to do, and he did it.

The splendour of sunset in *The Tempest* can escape no one, and the sternest opponent of guesswork must admit the probable presence of a designed allegory in the figure of Prospero and the burying of the book, the breaking of the staff, at the close. Even if this be thought too fanciful, nowhere has Shakespeare been more prodigal of every species of his enchantment. The exquisite but contrasted

grace of Miranda and Ariel, the wonderful creation of Caliban, the varied human criticism in Gonzalo and the bad brothers, the farce-comedy of Stephano and Trinculo, do not more show the illimitable fancy and creative power of the master in scene and character than the passages, not so much scattered as showered over the whole play, show his absolute supremacy in poetry. Both in the blank verse and the lyrics, in the dialogue and the set *tirades*, in long contexts and short phrases alike, he shows himself absolute, with nothing out of reach of his faculty of expression and suggestion, with every resource of verbal music and intellectual demonstration at his command.

Doubtful plays.

The so-called doubtful plays[1] of Shakespeare form an interesting subject, but one which can be dealt with but briefly here. As attributed by older tradition and assertion or by modern guesswork, they amount to "some dozen or sixteen," of which only three, the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, usually printed as Beaumont and Fletcher's, *Edward III.*, and *Arden of Feversham*, have any serious claims, though some have seen such in the *Yorkshire Tragedy*, a curious little horror-piece which, however, a dozen other men might have written. Others again, *Fair Em*, *Locrine*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, have absolutely nothing but unauthoritative though pretty ancient assertion to recommend them. As for the excepted three, the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, a dramatisation of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, has no suggestion of Shakespeare as a whole, but in parts shows extraordinary similarity to his versification. This has tempted some to think that Shakespeare may by chance have found his younger contemporaries (Beaumont, be it remembered, died in the same year with him) working at the play, have looked at it, and have mended or patched here and there for amusement or out of good-nature. *Edward III.* has the same similarities of versification, and in part, though a small part, of handling, but it is more suggestive of an extraordinarily clever piece of imitation or inspiration than of actual Shakespearian authorship. *Arden of Feversham*, on the other hand, has no similarities of versification, and does not, in its dealing with the murder of a husband by his wife and her base-born paramour, suggest Shakespeare's choice of subject, but is closer in some ways than any other play to his handling in character and psychological analysis.

[1] It was not till 1908 that a Shakespearian *Apocrypha*, containing 14 plays, was supplied by the Clarendon Press (Oxford, ed. C. F. Tucker-Brooke). Before this they were scattered in Hazlitt's *Dodsley*, Simpson's *School of Shakespeare*, and elsewhere; though there was a German edition (Halle, 1878-81) and a single vol. reprint (London, *n.d.*) of the plays added in the later folios.

CHAPTER II

SHAKESPEARE'S CONTEMPORARIES IN DRAMA

Disposition of the subject—Chronological and biographical cautions—Ben Jonson—His and other "humour"—His plays—His verse—The three masterpieces—Later plays—The *Masques*—Beaumont and Fletcher—Their lives—Their characteristics—And merits—Specimen plays—Shadowy personality of other dramatists—Sufficiency of their work—Chapman—Marston—Dekker—Middleton—Heywood—Webster—His two great plays—Day—Tourneur—Rowley.

FROM more than one thing which has been said already, it will be seen that the arrangement of the great period of the English drama for treatment in a literary history is beset by various difficulties.

Disposition of the subject.

The phases come so quick and overlap each other so intricately, that separate treatment is apt to create an entirely wrong general idea chronologically, while collective treatment is in danger of confusing the successive stages. For our present purpose the best way will probably be to take here all or almost all the men who during Shakespeare's lifetime produced something more than the mere beginning of their work, leaving even Massinger (though it is almost certain that he wrote before 1616), much more Ford, Shirley, etc., for the next Book; but to preface the individual dealings with some warning remarks which may keep the general procession clear.

Let it then be always remembered that the formative period of the University Wits was a very short one, and was contained, roughly speaking, in the decade from 1585 to 1596; that Shakespeare overlapped them at the one end, and the first ten years of Fletcher—the whole collaboration of Beaumont and Fletcher—on the other; that Ben Jonson, beginning before the Queen's reign ended, by some years, was the dramatist more especially of the reign of James, though he survived till near the outbreak of the civil dissensions; that Fletcher's death coincided nearly enough with the accession of Charles, so that he represents one side of the purely Jacobean

Chronological and biographical cautions.

drama as Ben does the other; and that most of the minor but still great men, Chapman, Dekker, Middleton, Heywood, Tourneur, Day, Marston, Webster, while often anticipating the end of Elizabeth's reign, and sometimes prolonging themselves into the beginning of Charles's, are still in the main ornaments more especially of that of the British Solomon, who, for all his *Reulis and Cautilis* (*vide infra*), certainly reaped where he had not sown. From what has been said already of this curiously tangled character of the subject, it will be understood that a strictly chronological arrangement of the writers enumerated, and others, is practically impossible. But it so happens that, without violating chronology in any important degree, we can arrange them in an order corresponding quite closely enough to their literary importance.

Ben Jonson.

Ben Jonson[1] (whose non-dramatic poetry is in bulk, and still more in influence, so important that it must be treated separately in the next chapter, while his prose will also come in for handling in a third) was nearly ten years younger than Shakespeare, and was born in London in the year 1573, some time after the death of his father, who was in orders. There seems to be no reason for doubting that the family was a branch of the Annandale Johnstones. He was educated at Westminster, but probably at neither University, though he afterwards received honorary degrees from both. His mother married a master bricklayer or builder, and Ben appears to have tried the business, but naturally did not like it. He enlisted and served for some time in the Netherlands, but seems to have come home while still a boy and to have married very early. The famous conversations with Drummond (see below), which, though not the very best of evidence, are about the best we have, do not represent this marriage as a very happy one, though Ben gives his wife a somewhat ungracious testimonial on the most important point. He was certainly one of the most solidly read men of an erudite time. We do not know how he gravitated to the stage, but Meres's mention of him is so early (1598) that *Every Man in his Humour*, Jonson's earliest known play, is sometimes put before this date. But we do not know that it was acted till then, and Meres's commendation is for tragedy. The wild life of the actors and playwrights of the time had nearly made Jonson's own end tragically premature, for he fought a duel with an actor of Henslowe's, Gabriel Spencer, in this same year, killed him, was tried for murder, but escaped by pleading "clergy" and being burnt in the hand, with loss of goods and chattels, which were probably not extensive. During the early years of James we know little of him except from the *Conversations* and a few tradi-

[1] *Works*, ed. Gifford and Cunningham (3 vols. London, *n.d.*).

tional stories, mostly of literary quarrels. But in the second decade of the seventeenth century he became a sort of regular dictator of literature, the head of successive groups of young men of letters whom he called his "sons," the furnisher, conjointly with Inigo Jones as designer and mechanician till they quarrelled, of many court masques, which contain exquisite poetry, and Poet Laureate, or something like it. The journey to Scotland, in which he visited Drummond at Hawthornden, took place in 1619. His last years were not wholly happy, for his health, partly owing to his conviviality, was impaired, and he was often in straits for money from the fickleness of the court and stage favour on which alone he depended. But when he died in 1637 there was probably no competent opinion which did not regard him as the head of English literature, a position which he practically held till Dryden was served heir to it.

Jonson's first play, *Every Man in his Humour* (which after having been acted at the Rose in a form not now extant, about 1596, was transferred in its present shape to the Globe and acted in by Shakespeare two years later), expresses in more than its title the kind of drama in which he specially excelled. The successive or contemporary senses of the much-discussed word "humour" in English can be put shortly without too much assumption on debatable points. Taking its original meaning in the modern languages from the medico-philosophical sense of "humour" as a constituent of the bodily frame influencing health or disease, it passes into the connotation of "temper," "disposition," which it still retains. From this, and by a slight reaction and variation upon its first meaning, it comes to signify a particular idiosyncrasy—a whim or caprice distinguishing the individual—and it is in this sense that Jonson constantly uses it and illustrates it in his plays. Only much later, and by degrees very difficult to mark with any accuracy, did it acquire that sense of distinction from, though not opposition to, wit in which it has become the designation of a quality so frequently found in English literature and elsewhere—a feeling and presentation of the ludicrous which does not stop there but includes something more, a sympathetic, or at least meditative, transcendency. In this last sense Shakespeare is the greatest of all humorists, and Jonson has not much claim to be one, for his temper was unsympathetic and his intellect, though strong, was a little coarse. But in the delineation, never absolutely caricatured, of "humours" in the plural form and lesser sense he has had few rivals.

His and other "humour."

In *Every Man in his Humour* the freshness of the writer's vein prevents the tendency to "cut-and-driedness" to which his scheme is exposed, and the result is delightful, especially in the boasting coward Bobadil and the gull Master Stephen, who wants "a stool to

be melancholy upon," while the sketches of manners, always the strong point of the humour-play, show us, almost for the first time, a variety of interest and of excellence which was one of the chief features of the Elizabethan drama out of Shakespeare. For there is nothing more distinctive of Shakespeare than the way in which, despite his intensely English patriotism and his intensely English spirit, his painting of manners always transcends the merely graphic and local. He has enough of this last for his purpose, but only enough, and it was no part of his purpose to indicate for us accurately the flat cap and shining shoes of the citizen, or to make us acquainted with Pickthatch and Hogsden.

His plays.

Every Man out of his Humour, which followed in 1599, is undoubtedly open to some of those strictures on sequels which, though often applied with undiscriminating woodenness, have some basis of experience. The elaborate characterisings of the persons which the author thought it necessary to prefix betray a certain suspicion that they do not sufficiently explain themselves; the mostly Italian index-names, Deliro, Fallace, Asper, and the rest, are teasing to the reader, and slight his memory and his judgment by suggesting that the one is too short and the other too feeble to identify the specimen without the label. Yet there is both fine verse and fine prose in the play, and the satire on the word "humour" itself, which is constantly put into the mouths of the characters, shows that Jonson was never his own dupe, though he might sometimes be his own mimic. And his realism has the advantages of its defects. We might have gone all over the London of 1599 without meeting Falstaff (who indeed had long been in Arthur's bosom), but we should have had, in all probability, no difficulty in finding twenty Fastidious Brisks between St. Paul's and Westminster.

The third play, *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), is an attempt to follow Lyly, but with direct satire on Euphuism itself, and in a harsher, harder style than that of the author of *Midas*. Indeed, Jonson's tendency to rough personal attack, and to a self-assertion undoubtedly arrogant, though too well justified by his gifts to be absolutely ludicrous, was growing on him very fast. And his next play, *The Poetaster* (1601-1602), in which the ostensible characters are those of Augustus and his court, was recognised as a direct assault on his own rivals, especially Marston and Dekker, while Tucca, the principal comic character, was seen at once to be drawn from an actual parasite of the time, one Captain Hannam. Yet there is stuff in it, and fine stuff, while Jonson's progress in his own style of versification is very marked. This, while it never attains to anything like the universal adaptability of Shakespeare's and is seldom distinguished by the ease and grace of Fletcher's, has great

His verse.

dignity and rhetorical force not really injured by any compensating stiffness. And it served him well in the fine Roman play of *Sejanus* which followed (1603), which was acted in, and at first, perhaps, originally contributed to by Shakespeare, which, except some of the masques, contains Jonson's best dramatic verse as verse, and which exhibits extraordinary familiarity with the classic originals—a familiarity not resulting, as is too often the case, in any overloading with erudition.

The three masterpieces.

It was, however, in his three next pieces, *Volpone, or the Fox*, *Epicene, or the Silent Woman*, and *The Alchemist*, that Jonson's genius as a dramatist found the fullest scope. To the present writer's judgment they seem to present a gradual crescendo of excellence. Strong as is *Volpone* (in which the devices of a rich, wicked, and misanthropic Italian to bring shame and disaster on his flatterers and legacy-hunters result in his own utter ruin) it is still marred a little by a too great separation in the characters (the result of the humour-theory), by the unmitigated rascality or folly of almost everybody in it, and by the improbability of Volpone's playing a game as dangerous as it was detestable. *The Silent Woman* was unsparingly admired by its own and the following generation for the cunning of its plot, the satisfactory adjustment of the contributory humours, and the admirable character of Morose, the best of all the misanthropes of the modern stage. But both plays fall short of *The Alchemist*. Here is Sir Epicure Mammon, the one character of the dramatist who requires no allowances and exceptions in the description of him as absolutely of the first class, no longer the mere vehicle of a "humour," but the incarnation of a human temperament—that in which voluptuous and avaricious concupiscence is sublimed and idealised into something immortal. Even this great central figure is thoroughly supported by the group of his three deluders, and deluders of each other, Subtle, Dol, and Face, while all the minor characters, especially Abel Drugger (later Garrick's best character), are good, and the story of the play moves with a combination of exactness and alacrity rare in any writer, and particularly rare in Jonson. There is perhaps no old play which inspires even those who are not fanatically devoted to the theatre with such a desire to see it performed as this does, owing to the excellence of the stage-situations, though there is hardly any which, from the sensuous enthusiasm of Sir Epicure and the brazen yet not vulgar audacity of Dol, his "princess," to the fatuity of Drugger and the petulance of the Angry Boy, would require so powerful a cast.

As the great trio was led up to by one of Jonson's Roman plays, *Sejanus*, so the descent from it—for his later plays, though even at the worst not what Dryden in his rare moment of unkindness called

"dotages," *are* a descent—was begun by the other, *Catiline*, a piece which is critically on a level with its pendant in force, learning, and a certain stiffness. There is no stiffness in *Bartholomew Fair*, which followed *Catiline*, but it is rather an immense and audacious farce, dealing with the Puritans and the general humours of holiday London in a fashion excellently vigorous though undeniably coarse, than a comedy. *The Devil is an Ass* soars higher in scheme and kind. It is a comedy with a purpose, and a rather ambitious and hazardous one, being in effect a satire, as Gifford says, on monopolists and projectors on the one hand, on witch-finders and sham demoniacs on the other. After this there appears to have been a very long gap in Jonson's productions for the regular stage, though he was fertile in masques. When he reappeared on the boards in 1625, with *The Staple of News*, there was no great if any perceptible falling off either in wit, in satire, or in the vivid portrayal of the "humours." But of his last three plays, *The New Inn*, *The Magnetic Lady*, and the *Tale of a Tub*, the first was definitely damned, with the result of an indignant protest from the poet and divers replies, consolatory or otherwise, from other writers. The second had a mixed reception, and it is not known whether the third was ever acted publicly, though it certainly did not please when performed at court. Nor in any of the cases, despite passages and characters of merit, can they be said to do full justice to the author's powers. That these powers were, however, by no means gone is shown by his last and unfinished work, *The Sad Shepherd*, a pastoral drama fancifully blended of the story of Robin Hood and a fairy tale, which is one of the most exquisite things of the Elizabethan age—the "satire, wit, and strength" which, far more than to Wycherley, may be attributed to its author being here accompanied by a sweetness and poetical charm, discoverable indeed in his minor poetical productions, but seldom to be observed even in his greatest plays.

Later plays.

Between the poems and the plays, but connected with the latter by the *Sad Shepherd* itself, come the *Masques*,[1] the most considerable body of that kind, both as to bulk and as to excellence, to be found in English. Much has been written on the probably Italian origin of the masque, a performance specially meant for amateurs to act. But the thing is so natural a growth in the conditions which made dramatic entertainments the particular amusement of courts, that it requires no elaborate or precise pedigree. It may be described as a dramatic entertainment in which plot, character, and even to a great extent dialogue, are subordinated on the one hand to spectacular illustration, and on the other

The *Masques*.

[1] Mr. H. A. Evans's *English Masques* (London, 1897) contains a good selection of others besides Jonson's.

to musical accompaniment. It was thus a sort of precursor of the opera, and disappeared when the opera became popular. The seventeenth century, and especially the first half thereof, was the palmy time of the masque in England. Of these pieces Ben Jonson has left us nearly forty. Most of them, as mentioned, were written in conjunction with Inigo Jones, who supplied the decorations, going far beyond mere scenery and dresses, and such as must often have taxed the utmost ingenuity even of a consummate architect and engineer. Special dancing-masters (a profession of importance at the time) arranged the choregraphy, and the best composers, such as Ferrabosco and Lanier, gave the music for these entertainments, on which sums representing scores of thousands of pounds in our money were lavished. But no expense could be more than worthy of the inexhaustible supplies of wit, learning, and real poetry on which Jonson drew unsparingly for the libretti. If Milton, as he undoubtedly did, bettered Jonson's instruction in *Comus* and the *Arcades*, yet it was Jonson's instruction that he bettered, and by far less than is commonly thought. For hardly any one now reads these charming pieces, couched in an obsolete form and burdened with the rubbish, as it now is, of stage directions and stage business, but displaying in the dialogue constant felicity, and in the abundant lyrics that very sober grace and half demure elegance of craftmanship by which Milton has won not the worst or least genuine part of his own fame.[1]

Beaumont and Fletcher.

The work of Beaumont and Fletcher[2] is even more voluminous than that of Jonson; it is indeed the most voluminous of any that we have from the greater figures of our drama, so that to go through it here on the same scale as that which has been allowed to Ben would be impossible. It would also be unnecessary, for their plays are much more homogeneous than his in general conception. They are, with hardly an exception, romantic comedies or romantic tragedies, differing remarkably from Shakespeare's in their ethics, and usually in their versification, but distantly belonging to the same general group in scheme, and subordinating all their subjects, classical, modern, fantastic, or historical, to this general scheme. The lives of the pair are not much known,

[1] *The Case is Altered*, a crude but not uncharacteristic piece, was probably produced in 1598 or 1599, and was published in 1609, but not by Jonson himself.

[2] The twin dramatists had not been re-edited as wholes since the editions of Darley (2 vols.) and Dyce (11 vols.) in 1840-50. The former is the cheapest, the latter the most authoritative. *Two* new editions by Mr. Bullen and Mr. Waller have recently made their appearance. A fairly full selection of complete plays will be found in 2 vols. of the "Mermaid Series." The old edition of 1750 (10 vols.), by various editors, though not very critical, is useful.

and the distribution of the dramatic work which commonly goes under their joint names is extremely uncertain, though from Beaumont's very short life he can hardly have had much of a hand in the majority of it. The traditional allotment of the part of creator to Fletcher and of critic to Beaumont rests on no solid authority, and is a sort of commonplace in reference to such collaborations.

Their lives.

John Fletcher, the elder, the longer-lived, and undoubtedly the more prolific of the two, though perhaps not the greater genius, belonged to a remarkable literary family, though the power was not so much shown in his father (who, as Dean of Peterborough, made himself unpleasantly notorious at the execution of Queen Mary, and died Bishop of London) as in his uncle, Giles Fletcher, the author of *Licia*, and his cousins, Giles and Phineas, the not too unequal followers of Spenser (*vide infra*). The bishop died poor, and his son, who had entered Benet or Corpus College at Cambridge early, was left to shift for himself at seventeen. We know nothing of him personally; but the anecdote in Shadwell's *Bury Fair*, which presents him as living in lodgings with one maid-servant, who, when he entertained friends, "had her sack in a beer-glass," is quite likely to be an actual tradition, for the forte of "Og" was not inventiveness. For some time, we are told, he and his partner in the dramas lived together. He died of the plague in August 1625. Francis Beaumont was the son of a Justice of the Common Pleas, and belonged to a good family in Leicestershire, in which county he was born at Gracedieu in 1584. He became a member of Broadgates Hall (afterwards Pembroke College), Oxford, in 1597, and entered the Inner Temple in 1600. Beaumont was an intimate friend not merely of Fletcher but of Jonson, to whom he wrote a very remarkable ode. He married in 1613, and died three years later. Except *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, an Ovidian paraphrase in the luscious school of which Shakespeare's two great poems and Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* are the chief, and the anonymous *Britain's Ida* the next best, Beaumont's poetical work is very uncertain, and the collections which go under his name (reproduced in Chalmers) are a mere medley of work, sometimes certainly, often probably, belonging to others. But the contemporary estimate of his poetical genius was very high, and he traditionally has the credit of most, if not all, of the exquisite songs which are scattered about the plays, while Fletcher in the same tradition contents himself with drama only.

As guesswork is kept out of this book as much as possible, no space will be given to the attempts which have been made (in hardly any case upon documentary evidence) to assign the authorship of the great total of fifty-two plays to Fletcher, Beaumont and Fletcher,

Beaumont and Fletcher and Shakespeare, Fletcher and Massinger, Fletcher and Shirley, Fletcher and Rowley. It is sufficient to say that in the whole there is a sufficient similarity, and in almost every individual play there is sufficient elasticity and variety of manner, to make such distributions extremely hazardous, if not utterly idle. About *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, and *A King and no King*, there can be no reasonable dispute; because the ascription of joint authorship to them is older than Fletcher's death. And it so happens that these three plays furnish a sufficient range both of comic and tragic handling and expression to enable us to separate the special joint quality of the collaboration. Nor is this wanting in any one of the others.[1]

In verse these plays tend to a looser style, and admit more redundant syllables than those of Ben or even of Shakespeare; and we have spoken of their general scheme as dramas. There is room for somewhat more discussion as to their temper and morality. This has been as a rule rather unfavourably spoken of, and it is true that the authors neither observe the bare poetical justice which is one of the notes of Jonson, nor that higher, more impartial ethic—admitting the actual conditions of life and fate, but always making for righteousness—which is one of the greatest glories of Shakespeare. Their sentiment, though frequently exquisite, as in *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *Thierry and Theodoret*, and elsewhere, is often if not always slightly strained and morbid, the pathos is, so to speak, "loaded," and the situations which bring it about are not always natural. Towards what is commonly and widely called "vice" they hold an attitude which, while it never even approaches the prurient and deliberate provocation of the Restoration drama, comes nearer to sympathy than the Olympian acknowledgment of Shakespeare, or the humorous tolerance of Fielding. In mere language they are no coarser than their fellows; and Dryden committed the proverbial blunder of self-excusers when he tried to shelter himself, and his fellow-sinners at the other end of the century, under even the exceedingly broad shield of the *Custom of the Country*. But it may be that the moral standard, to adopt the favourite phrase, is a little lowered in them, the moral currency a little debased. Indeed, this is almost implied in the fact that they were, and long continued to be, the most popular of all English dramatists, their plays not merely surviving the Restoration and its change of taste, but even the reaction from that change itself, and holding the stage all through the eighteenth century, and well into the nineteenth. This, while a testimony to their stage-craft on one side, and on

Their characteristics.

[1] A brief reasoned catalogue of the whole will be found in my *Elizabethan Literature*, pp. 258-266.

another to a certain kind of nature, is on another also evidence of a certain vulgarity—though not in the worst sense of the word.

At the same time, their merits are exceedingly great. The wonderful copiousness, variety, and, with inevitable inequality, freedom from failure, of this vast collection of plays must strike every reader. In one point—a delightful feature common, though not universal, at the time—the songs which they contain, they not seldom come near Shakespeare in quality, while in this particular respect they exceed him in quantity and variety. Indeed, it is not quite certain whether one of the most exquisite [1] of this entire section of literature is Shakespeare's or theirs. They brought on the stage a crew of harum-scarum, but not ungenerous young men; of lively, merry, but not unmaidenly or unladylike girls; who are very natural and agreeable people to keep stage company with. As distinguished from the merely chaotic construction of the earlier drama, and the correct but slightly ponderous and elaborately geared machinery of Jonson, their arrangement of plot and incident is at once workmanlike and easy. Nor, though it would be impossible to go through all their plays, must we omit more particular notice of some. And merits.

Perhaps the most general favourite of all, certainly that which has the prettiest passages, and which gives the best example of the authors' peculiar variety of romantic play, is *Philaster*, a tragi-comedy which turns on the causeless jealousy of the hero and the faithfulness of his love, who, in the disguise of the page Bellario, follows him. The situation, which was, of course, much favoured by the practice, universal before the closing of the theatres, of committing women's parts to boys, took the public fancy, and was much imitated; but the charm of the play is quite independent of it, and though far more unreal and merely *literary* than that of not wholly dissimilar things in Shakespeare, is perhaps, in its special and lower kind, unique in English literature. This same taint or *haut-goût*, whichever it be preferred to call it, of unreality, and morbid or hectic sentiment, appears with a more tragic cast, but with not less, or little less, of its own peculiar success, in another of the undoubted joint works, *The Maid's Tragedy*. The authors have here appealed to some of the most affecting, though not the most simply or naturally affecting, motives that the playwright can bring into action—the conflict of friendship between Melantius and Amintor, the strain on the courtier's loyalty when his sovereign's mistress (not even a cast mistress) Evadne is put off on him, and the anguished innocence of Aspatia. The pathos, and even in a sense the power, of the working out of these is Specimen plays.

[1] "Roses, their sharp spines being gone."

assisted by very many passages of really exquisite poetry. In neither of these plays is there much pure comedy, but in *A King and no King* there is a serious part and a comic one, both good, and the latter containing the famous braggart Bessus, who makes up the great trinity of the English stage in this kind of part with Parolles and Bobadil. *The Scornful Lady*, which is usually attributed to Fletcher alone, is comic merely, and not only supplies comedy of a very high order, but had an immense influence on following generations down to, and perhaps even later than, Sheridan. The best pair with this is the equally famous *Humorous Lieutenant*, which inclines a little more in the direction of farce. Of plays approaching and sometimes reaching the first class there must be mentioned among the comedies *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, with its famous character of the "Copper Captain"; *The Little French Lawyer*, *Monsieur Thomas*, *The Chances*, *The Wild Goose Chase*, and that most agreeable burlesque *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*; among the tragedies *The False One*, *Valentinian*, *Thierry and Theodoret*, and *Bonduca*, each of which has one or more characters, and many more than one or two passages, of astonishing merit. The *Two Noble Kinsmen* would hardly rank very high, if it were not for the regular echo of Shakespearian verse which here and there meets us; but *The Faithful Shepherdess*, of which again Fletcher has the sole credit, is a most charming production, less pathetic, perhaps, than Jonson's companion fragment above noted, but more complete and not less sweet. And it may almost be said that in the whole half-century and more of plays there is hardly one, even of the weakest, where examples may not be found not merely of that strange "joint-stock poetry," as Scott, I think, once well described it, which is common to almost the whole Elizabethan drama from the highest to the lowest, but of special and peculiar music. Again, in a favourite catchword of their own day, they had "wit at will." On the merely humorous side it was almost as verbally felicitous as that of Congreve, and far more abundant, succulent, and various in its application; on the critical side it comes short of the very greatest only by an indefinite quantity. For the greater part of the nineteenth century, until very lately, they have paid by a certain slighting for their immense and enduring vogue during two centuries earlier. But with all their drawbacks, all the slight tokens of "decadence" in them, they must be ranked so high that none except *der Einzige* can be put above them.

Of the personal history of those writers who will occupy the rest of this chapter almost incredibly little is known, the amount in some cases extending not much beyond the bare name, without any certain dates, and with not much certainty of authorship, while in hardly any case does it extend beyond the barest outline of a life. George Chap-

man was probably born at or near Hitchin in or about 1558, became a member of the University of Oxford in 1574, was known as a dramatist soon after the beginning of the last decade of the century, was a good friend of Jonson's, with whom and Marston he got into trouble in 1613 for a supposed insult to the Scotch in *Eastward Ho*, was patronised by Prince Henry and by James's favourite Carr, wrote plays, poems, and translations for many years, and died in or about 1634. John Marston (birth-date unknown, but of a good family in the Midlands) was educated at Coventry School and at Brasenose College, wrote poems and satires before the beginning of the seventeenth century, and plays after it, was beaten by Jonson, and had his pistol taken from him (Ben *teste*), took orders late, became vicar of Christchurch, and died in the same year with Chapman. Of Thomas Dekker we know no date, no fact, no anecdote, nothing at all, except that by his own statement in 1637 he was threescore or thereabouts. John Webster is in similar case, it being merely a guess that he was, as some one of his name certainly was, parish clerk of St. Andrew's, Holborn. Of Thomas Middleton we know a little more, which, however, includes neither the certain date nor the place of his birth (London and 1570 appear probable) nor his education. He began to write paraphrases and satires before 1600, passed like others into playwriting, was chronographer to the City of London in 1620, and in 1623 imprisoned for the attack on Gondomar in his *Game of Chess*. He died at Newington Butts, in 1627, and left a widow named Magdalen. Of Heywood, another Thomas, we know little or nothing, save that he came from Lincolnshire and was a fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge. Of John Day, little save that he was a member of Gonville and Caius College, in the same University. Of Cyril Tourneur a few facts of military service.

Shadowy personality of other dramatists.

Fortunately, however, if we know little about the men, which is a matter of slight consequence, or none at all, to literature, we know a good deal about the works, which are of the highest consequence. Much is no doubt lost, very few MS. dramas having escaped the rough usage in the original stage, the carelessness of the fifty years or more when such things were regarded as rubbish, and the positive destruction which occurred in at least one notorious case (that of the herald Warburton, whose cook used up old plays for household purposes), and beyond all question in scores of unrecorded ones. Even of those which got into print there has been loss. But nevertheless there is no author of Elizabethan drama whom there is any reason to believe to have been really remarkable, and of whom we have not more or less ample remains. The actual amount varies from the two dramas of Tourneur

Sufficiency of their work.

to the two or three dozen—remnants of between two and three hundred—of Heywood. And while we have thus sufficient material for discerning the idiosyncrasies of individuals, the total mass of matter is so great and so varied that we are very unlikely indeed to miss specimens of any general kind.

Chapman.

The dramatic work of Chapman,[1] almost first made and almost latest left of all the knights of this Round Table, includes no single play of very commanding excellence, and is distinguished, even in this period, for want of finish. But in individual passages it shows the same great though insufficiently co-ordinated and organised power which animates his poems and translations, and it includes one of those interesting series of mainly chronicle plays which form one of the most remarkable features of the whole subject. *Bussy d'Ambois*, *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, *Byron's Conspiracy*, *The Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron*, and *The Tragedy of Philip Chabot, Admiral of France*, all dealing with the nearly contemporary history of a neighbouring country, show, when regarded from one point of view, how the drama was striving to do the part of the uninvented newspaper and the still rudimentary novel. They even give the latest instances of the early "Titanic" style of Elizabethan drama. Chapman was connected in more than one literary way with Marlowe, whose *Hero and Leander* he finished; and while his best tragic passages preserve not a little of the "thunder-smoke" of his great predecessor, it is noteworthy that, by the confession of the greatest writer of the next age, they had considerable influence on what we unkindly call the rant of Dryden's own heroic drama. Good examples of Chapman's tragic power are almost confined to these plays, the later tragedies of *Caesar and Pompey*, *Alphonsus Emperor of Germany*, and *Revenge for Honour* being unworthy of their author, if indeed the two last be his at all. But in the *Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, *An Humorous Day's Mirth*, *The Gentleman Usher*, *Monsieur d'Olive* (a kind of farcical offshoot of the French history series), *The Widow's Tears*, and, above all, *All Fools* and *May Day*, Chapman shows very satisfactory comic power. These plays, with *Eastward Ho*, in which, it must be remembered, he collaborated, place him high in the exposition of a kind of comedy less compact of mere humours than Jonson's, and if less airily gay than Fletcher's, and less saturated with poetry than Shakespeare's, yet exceeding in these various qualities the work of most other men.

There is little gaiety—less than in Jonson himself—in the third shareholder in *Eastward Ho* and its misfortunes. Marston[2] began

[1] *Works*, ed. R. H. Shepherd, with Essay by Mr. Swinburne, 3 vols. London, 1875. The *D'Ambois Plays*, by F. S. Boas (London and Boston, U.S.A., 1905).

[2] Ed. Halliwell, 3 vols. London, 1856; ed. Bullen, 3 vols. London, 1887.

as a satirist; and both the deliberate misanthropy of thought and the not always well-carried-off extravagance of expression which mark his satires distinguish his plays pretty nearly throughout. Marston. The two parts of *Antonio and Mellida* might, for the sanguinary inconsequence of the plot and the high-strung and hectoring tone of the language, have been written some dozen or sixteen years earlier than they actually were. There is good poetry in the play, but hardly good drama. The subject of *Sophonisba*, which was particularly tempting to the more melodramatic dramatists of the seventeenth century in several countries, naturally did not tame Marston's disposition to horrors in incident and rant in language; but it kept him more to the point, and permitted fewer alarums and excursions. His masterpiece, however, must be sought either in *What You Will*, a comedy which could not be a more complete contrast to Shakespeare's play of the name, but which had distinct merits, or else in *The Malcontent*, a satirical play of the same stamp as Jonson's, Molière's, and Wycherley's, representing an honest misanthrope. *Parasitaster* and *The Dutch Courtesan* are inferior; while if *The Insatiate Countess* be his, it most certainly does not do him much credit. It was Marston's great misfortune that to a decided want of range he joined an intensity which is not itself entirely free from suspicions of affectation. His readers not only, like Lamb with Hazlitt, "wish he would not quarrel with the world at the rate he does," but sometimes doubt whether Marston really thought so badly of human nature as he seems to do. Nevertheless, he is by no means destitute of the towering strain of his predecessors and earlier contemporaries, and his gloomy rhetoric not very seldom becomes real eloquence.

No greater contrast of tone and temper could be imagined than that which is actually presented in the works of Marston and in those of his colleague in the unknown proceedings, which drew down on both the wrath of Ben Jonson. Nor, looking at Dekker[1] Dekker. from another point of view, does any writer of the time illustrate more strikingly that other contrast which has been referred to, the contrast between the abundant literary and the almost non-existent biographical documents about these men. Of Dekker the man, we know, as has been said, as nearly as possible nothing; from Dekker the writer, we have not only an abundant body of prose work which will be noticed below, but a plentiful collection of plays, sometimes written in conjunction with other men, but often enough independent. Moreover, it so happens, and luckily, that by putting together this last work, his work in collaboration, and the work

[1] *Plays* (ed. R. H. Shepherd?), 4 vols. London, 1873; *Prose*, ed. Grosart, 5 vols. privately printed, 1884.

either alone or with others of his collaborators, we can obtain an idea of his own literary temper and genius which is almost logically demonstrable. There is no evidence that he had any connection with the Universities, with the Inns of Court, or with any learned profession, or, as commonly reputed, respectable means of livelihood. He seems to have been simply a working dramatist and man of letters, an inhabitant of the earlier and more romantic, but not more fortunate, Grub Street. For some forty years he appears to have written plays and pamphlets, the direct ancestors and representatives of the novels and the newspapers by which his kind live, sometimes in splendour, often in decent comfort, to-day. It is certain that Dekker did not live in splendour, and probable that he did not often live in comfort. But he displays in his prose works great talent for observation and descriptive narration, and in his plays a most charming dramatic genius, a little, as is the wont of the time, chaotic and irregular, but sweet and pathetic, as is no contemporary save the master of all, especially in the delineation of women's characters, while he has both blank verse and lyric touches and flashes, not seldom well sustained, of divinest poetry. In the plays that are attributed to him in part or ascribed to him by guess, such as the *Virgin Martyr*, which appears in Massinger's works, and the *Witch of Edmonton*, these characteristics are seen; but they are more eminently visible in his own undoubted plays, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, *Patient Grissil*, *Satiromastix*, *Old Fortunatus*, and *The Honest Whore*. It is sufficient proof of Dekker's power in this way that in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and *Satiromastix* neither the clumsy composite device then in favour, of blending or rather strapping together (for there is practically no blend) a serious and a comic plot, in both, nor in the latter, the desire to hit back at Jonson for his attack in *The Poetaster*, prevents the display of it. *Old Fortunatus*, the well-known story of the wishing-cap and other gifts, is his chief exploit in purely romantic and fanciful drama; and though chaotic beyond even his wont, has wonderful force and fancy. *Patient Grissil* and *The Honest Whore*—the former based, of course, on Boccaccio, the latter taking for heroine a woman who has lost her reputation, but retrieves it by her patience, constancy, and inviolable purity after marriage—are the great texts for Dekker's dealing with the characters of women, and the latter shows a felicity of conception and power of execution of which the very greatest dramatists might be proud. Nor does Dekker rank much below Shakespeare or Fletcher for his lyrics, the best of which, "Cold's the wind and wet's the rain," "Fortune's smiles, cry Holiday!" "Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers," "Cast away care," and others, are better known than the plays containing them.

Middleton, confining himself, or nearly so, to drama, was even a more voluminous playwright than Dekker, at least so far as extant pieces are concerned, his works extending in the best edition to eight volumes.[1] About half a score of these are examples of those dramas of manners of which, as has been said, the Elizabethan dramatists other than Shakespeare have left us so many. No one of these[2] is very much above or very much below the others; indeed, Middleton, while rather rarely reaching or approaching the highest rank, seldom drops so low as most of his fellows occasionally do. Yet he was capable of much better work than this journalist drama, as it may be called, and he showed it in nearly as many more plays written chiefly in collaboration with Dekker or Rowley, but distinguished very remarkably from their independent work. At the head of these stands the great play of *The Changeling*, where, as indeed usually in these mixed plays, the comic part is nearly worthless, while the tragic contains, in the characters of the heroine, Beatrice-Joanna and her—he can hardly be called lover—but first tool and then tyrant, the bravo De Flores, some of the greatest things out of Shakespeare. So, too, *The Mayor of Queenborough*, comically despicable, or at least commonplace, takes for the tragic subject Vortiger's passion for Rowena, and determination to get rid of his wife Castiza, and treats it with the same intensity and nearly the same wonderful projection of character. *Women beware Women*, sometimes spoken of as his masterpiece, is a tragedy more domestic in type than those, and less lurid, but almost equally, though more quietly, intense; and *The Witch* has interest besides the remarkable problem of its relation to *Macbeth*. *A Fair Quarrel* has received very high praise from some, but seems to others distinctly below these. But the political attractions of *A Game of Chess* are not its only ones; and *The Spanish Gipsy* is a romantic comedy which deserves to stand not too far below *As You Like It*, Middleton having for once transcended mere manners and humours, shaken off the atmosphere of Fleet Street and Duke Humphrey's tomb, avoided the way of extravagant tragedy, and hit upon that—less trodden but almost certain to lead the due feet to success—of romance crossed with or expressed in drama.

Middleton.

In the voluminous work of Heywood, the "prose Shakespeare" of Lamb (a phrase which has been a good deal misunderstood), there are less definite and eminent qualities than in that of almost any man yet mentioned in this chapter. He wrote much else besides

[1] Ed. Bullen, 8 vols. London, 1885.

[2] *Blurt Master Constable, Michaelmas Term, A Trick to Catch the Old One, The Family of Love, A Mad World, my Masters, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, Anything for a Quiet Life*, etc.

plays, but his non-dramatic work is almost entirely forgotten, and of his dramatic it can hardly be said that more than one piece, the famous *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, survives as much more than a name. This has for theme the difficult and dangerous subject of the self-restraint, and—though not tolerance—charity of the betrayed husband Frankford. And Heywood has plucked safety and success from danger by the extreme pathos and tenderness with which he treats a rather impossible situation. Elsewhere, though never quite contemptible, he is seldom great. His chronicle plays (*Edward IV.* and *The Troubles of Queen Elizabeth*, each in two parts) exhibit the want of unity which is the drawback of their kind, without the panoramic and historical-novel effect which can be got out of them by those who know how. His dramatisations of the *Metamorphoses* and other such things show a continuance of the earlier confusion as to what is and what is not matter for drama, which is rare after the beginning of the seventeenth century; while his masques and pageants entirely lack the grace and fancy, mixed with learning, which save spectacles in the hands of Jonson. He is, however, fairly strong in the comedy of London manners and humours, and very strong in the domestic drama, of which his already-mentioned masterpiece may claim to be our chief instance. Nor has he small command of another, not the least agreeable of the sub-varieties of the plays of the time, the adventure-drama, of which he has left us some remarkable specimens.[1] He is not a great master of versification, and one is apt to be more convinced of the "prose" than of the "Shakespeare" in Lamb's dictum. Yet, as if to show in a single instance the truth well put in Scott's observation quoted above, some of the very finest things of the whole body are his.

Heywood.

In all respects John Webster[2] is the direct opposite to Heywood. The work existing as his is fairly voluminous, and we know that some, perhaps much, is lost; but a good deal both of the extant and non-extant work attributed to him seems to have been done in collaboration, and very little of this, as we now have it, is worth much. But two very great plays, *Vittoria Corombona, or the White Devil*, and the *Duchess of Malfy*, and two lesser ones, the *Devil's Law Case* and *Appius and Virginia*, are ascribed to him, without assertion or suggestion of any helper. *Appius and Virginia* is a classical tragedy, showing neither the learning and dignity of

Webster.

[1] *The Fair Maid of the Exchange, The Fair Maid of the West, The English Traveller, A Challenge for Beauty, Fortune by Land and Sea, A Royal King and Loyal Subject*, may represent these two classes. Indeed, we have between twenty and thirty plays of Heywood's reprinted (6 vols. London, 1874), and his actual production (much of it, no doubt, adaptation only) was some ten times as large.

[2] Ed. Dyce, 1 vol. London.

Jonson's nor the universal humanity of Shakespeare's attempts in this style; and the *Devil's Law Case*, though attractive in parts, has a treble portion of the chaotic defect of the time. But the first pair would suffice to put Webster in the very first rank. All the four, as well as most of the work which remains extant as his, and the titles of some that is lost, imply a remarkable tendency to gloom, and to supernatural as well as natural terror and horror. He has left us, in the "Address to the Reader" of the *White Devil*, a curious appreciation of the seven contemporary dramatists whom he seems to have ranked highest, and though the language (especially taken with his own caveat) must not be strained too far, yet it may be suspected that his classification of Shakespeare with Dekker and Heywood, and the particular phrase[1] he selects for them, may have something to do with the general, though not universal, cheerfulness which prevails in all three.

Of cheerfulness Webster himself knows nothing; his comedy, wherever he attempts it, is a forced guffaw, his passion of love, though powerful, has nothing bright or ethereal about it, but shares the luridness of his other motives; and he is most at home in the horrors, almost unmitigated, of his two great plays. The *White Devil* (printed 1612) is founded with extreme closeness, and only a few dramatic and poetic embellishments, on the historical story of Vittoria Corombona (or rather Accoramboni), which may be found, told by the late Mr. T. A. Trollope, in an early number of Dickens's *All the Year Round*. The heroine is an Italian Helen, whose beauty and unscrupulousness bring murder and crime wherever she goes. She is well seconded or egged on in her evil deeds by her brother Flamineo, a ruffian who, though less human and natural than Iago, De Flores, or even Aaron, in *Titus Andronicus*, completes the quartette brilliantly, and so stands far above all others. The action is so extremely compressed as to have the appearance of confusion, but it is in reality clear enough; and many of the separate scenes and passages have a gloomy intensity of passion difficult to parallel elsewhere, except in the companion play. The mad scene of Cornelia, Vittoria's mother, with her dirge over her son Marcello, murdered by his brother Flamineo, has received deserved praise from all for its wonderful "eeriness"; but perhaps Vittoria's own words after she has been mortally stabbed—

His two great plays.

> My soul, like to a ship in a dark storm,
> Is driven I know not whither,

[1] "Right happy and copious industry." He had assigned a "full and heightened style" to Chapman, "laboured and understanding work" to Jonson, and "no less worthy companions" to Beaumont and Fletcher.

rank even higher for their attainment of the greatest poetical effect with the simplest language and the least out-of-the-way imagery.

The Duchess of Malfy (printed 1623), the story of which was no doubt taken from that usual storehouse of the Elizabethan dramatist, Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, is of less concentrated attraction. The heroine marries her steward, and is persecuted for it by her brothers. They employ an instrument named Bosola, a second but weaker Flamineo, who plays the outspoken misanthrope. The real excellence of the play is almost confined to the fourth act, where the unhappy duchess is first imprisoned in a madhouse by her brothers, and then murdered. The fifth, at the end of which everybody kills off everybody else—the husband, the brothers, and Bosola—is no improvement, and shows Webster's lack of dramatic tact. But he had a great though confused imagination, and a wonderful power of phrase.

Day.

The work of John Day[1] is a good example of the "intricate impeach" of these plays and playwrights generally. His life would appear to have extended practically over the whole of the dramatic period (1580-1640), and from record it would seem that in five of these years only (1598-1603) he collaborated in twenty-one plays, of which only the odd one, the *Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green*, survives in accessible form. Besides these he wrote with others and alone in later years, *Law Tricks*, the *Travels of Three Brothers* (the Shirleys), *The Isle of Gulls*, *Humour out of Breath*, and his most famous work, the *Parliament of Bees*. Most, if not all of these, seem to have been produced in a space not longer than that taken by the earlier and mostly unknown batch. They display, however, or most of them do, a certain character which is distinct from that of most of the plays of the period, and comes nearest to Lyly's—that is to say, the presentation in dramatic form of a series of scenes or tableaux embodying a more or less fantastic satire of the ethical kind, rather than a definite play-story. This is especially noticeable in the *Parliament of Bees*, by which indeed, except to more or less thorough-going students, Day may be sufficiently known. For the last thirty years of his presumed life he appears to have written little or nothing ; and indeed he would seem altogether to have been one of those men who were rather hatched and coaxed into production by the prevailing heat and inspiration of the time than driven to it by necessity of their own talent. A gay and graceful spirit of fantastic allegory is his chief note.

Nothing that is gay and little that is graceful appears in the two grim plays of Cyril Tourneur,[2] though allegory had hold on him also, as is seen in his non-dramatic piece, the *Transformed Metamorphosis*.

[1] Ed. Bullen, privately printed, 1881.
[2] Ed. Churton Collins, 2 vols. London, 1878.

The *Atheist's Tragedy* and the *Revenger's Tragedy* are the extremes of the kind of extravagant horror-mongering in drama which Marlowe almost dragged to success in *The Jew of Malta*, and which Shakespeare tried and left in *Titus Andronicus*. Tourneur. The *Revenger's Tragedy* is by far the better of the two, having a glimmering of plot and some noble though austere sketches of character, with abundance of magnificent though gloomy poetry. The *Atheist's Tragedy*, with glimpses of the pathetic, and the strange bronze-medallion stamps of line here and there which these horror-mongers not seldom contrive to impress, is mere chaos and nightmare, beside which the *Spanish Tragedy* is an orderly attempt in serious drama, and *The Insatiate Countess* a well-arranged study of manners.

From William Rowley, besides a very large amount of known or probable collaboration, we have two or three separate plays, such as *A New Wonder* and *A Match at Midnight*,[1] which are very far from contemptible, and help us to mark off and appreciate his work with others. Rowley. His special gift would appear to have been the arrangement of that humours-and-manners comedy of contemporary London which, as has been said, played such a large part in the dramatic works of the first half of the seventeenth century. Of this he must have had no small command, for though his comedy is rather rough, and his construction seldom soars above a kind of rough-and-ready stage-craft, he has humour and power of direct presentation. If any one will take one of his plays and a specimen from even the more commended writers of the next century, Mrs. Centlivre, Cibber, Mrs. Cowley, down to Foote and O'Keeffe, he will begin to understand why the ordinary plays of the seventeenth century are ranked as literature, while those of the eighteenth are not.

[1] This will be found in Hazlitt's *Dodsley*. A separate edition of Rowley has long been expected from Mr. Bullen.

CHAPTER III

THE SCHOOLS OF JACOBEAN POETRY

Drayton—The *Polyolbion*—Other poems—Daniel—Sylvester—Sir John Davies—Minor poets—Chapman—Fairfax—Campion—The Spenserians: minor poets—The Fletchers—Giles—Phineas—W. Browne—Wither—Basse—The lyrical impulse—Jonson's poems—Donne.

THE division which has been here adopted, striking a line at the death of Spenser, and starting afresh from it, enables us in most respects to make cleaner work than if the death of Gloriana had been taken instead of that of Colin. We have behind us, and still freshly behind us, the remarkable school of the sonneteers—occasionally over-valued, but more often and more likely to be under-estimated—the quaint batch of early satirists, a group artificial and transitory; and the beginnings of the historical style of poetry. We have before us three well-marked schools: those of Spenser, Jonson, and Donne; in two cases with the heads of them living and exercising personal influence, in the third with the leader dead but none the less living in his work.

We have, however, two remarkable writers in the strictly poetical way to deal with—one of them hardly a dramatist (so far as extant work goes) or prose-writer, though a very voluminous poet; the other the author both of prose and of plays, but a poet chiefly—who began to write some decade before Spenser's death. Of these, one lived till six years before the accession of Charles I., the other till six years after it. Both were sonneteers; both were historical poets; but both, with quite admirable touches of poetic genius now and then, and an almost too plentiful vein, lacked at once the initiative and the perfecting wit of Spenser. These were Michael Drayton and Samuel Daniel.

All former accounts of Drayton's life have been antiquated by Mr. Oliver Elton's capital monograph for the Spenser Society,[1] yet

[1] Reprinted, with additions, London, 1905. There is no complete edition of Drayton, but one is promised, and Chalmers has nearly the whole.

even now it cannot be said that we know very much about him. He came, like Shakespeare, from Warwickshire, and if not of gentle birth himself, was from the first attached in the honourable fashion of service to gentle houses, and seems to have had some employment at court. His life nearly covered the full seventy years, for he was born about 1563 and died in 1631. He seems to have had no permanent connection with the stage,[1] but he fell early into the custom of sonneteering, his *Idea* (1594) being very probably addressed to the daughter of the house which protected him. The notices that we have give the notion of a man of masterful and not very obliging temper, who perhaps did not reach the rank or position which he thought his due, and was unwilling to be hail-fellow-well-met with mere pot-companions. Yet he seems to have been widely known, and to have excited, if no vehement friendships, no sharp dislike.

Drayton.

His poetical production is extremely voluminous; in fact, it is probably the largest that we have from any non-dramatic poet of real merit during the period. Its largest and most famous single item, the *Polyolbion* (1613-22) was not early—it could, indeed, hardly be so, for the idea of compiling a poetical gazetteer of the whole of England would be unlikely to occur to a very young poet, and could not possibly, in the dearth of books on the subject, have been carried out by any one who had not had many years to observe and amass materials. It has long been, and probably will ever hereafter be, little read; but those who read it doubt whether to reprobate the choice of poetic form (the Alexandrine with middle cæsura) for such a subject, or to admire the extraordinary resolution, resource, and, on the whole, success with which the work is carried out. It leaves, moreover, a considerable balance of work to Drayton's credit, a little of which is actually familiar to the choicer memories, while much deserves to be so. The sonnets, with the famous one—

The *Polyolbion*.

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part,

which does not appear in all editions, and the authorship of which has been disputed; *The Shepherd's Garland* (1593), which was also addressed to "Idea," and in fact preceded the sonnets, as did the

[1] It was, however, busy while it lasted, during, as it seems, the last five years of the Queen, when Drayton was one of Henslowe's hacks, botching up, generally in collaboration, nearly a score of plays, almost all lost. *William Longsword* (price £6, of which we have his receipt to Henslowe for forty shillings' advance) is the only one mentioned as his sole work. He had a fourth share in the pseudo-Shakespearian *Sir John Oldcastle*, the only certain play-work of his which survives. The attribution to him of the much better *Merry Devil of Edmonton* is only guess.

sacred poem of *The Harmony of the Church* (1591); *Mortimeriados*, which he issued in two forms and under two names, once in 1596 with the title just given, and once in 1603 as *The Barons' Wars;* and *England's Heroical Epistles* (1597), a batch of extremely vigorous historical pieces in miniature,—all came before the period at which, strictly speaking, we begin in this chapter. But Drayton did very much else besides these and the *Polyolbion*, being evidently much attracted to history. He wrote two poems on Agincourt, the one a slightly heavy narrative of length in ottava rima, the other the famous ballad beginning—

Other poems.

Fair stood the wind for France,

the excellence of which in itself, and its importance as a pattern, have long been recognised. *The Barons' Wars*, the expanded form of the *Mortimeriad*, extends to six books. The *Heroical Epistles* deal in couplets with passages of English story that give romantic persons such as Fair Rosamond, Matilda FitzWater, Queen Isabel and Mortimer, Queen Margaret and Suffolk, etc. etc., together with Surrey and Geraldine (a proof how Nash's fiction had taken hold) in pairs of epistles on the Ovidian model. *The Miseries of Queen Margaret* is an independent poem in octaves, and in the same metre Drayton executed four other historical legends on Robert Curthose, the above-mentioned Matilda, Gaveston, and Thomas Cromwell. Of a different kind are *Nymphidia*, the most elaborate fairy poem in the language; *The Mooncalf*, an odd political and social satire in couplets; *The Owl*, a long bird-fable; and *The Man in the Moon*, a version of the Endymion story. Beside these Drayton has left a collection of odes in divers metres and some pastorals; *The Muses' Elysium* (this appeared in 1630, just before his death; he had collected many of the others in a volume three years before) in ten "Nymphals," and some odd versifyings of the stories of Noah, Moses, and David. He can be sometimes flat; but few English poets have grappled with a larger number of important poetic subjects more vigorously and with happier touches at times.

The shorter life of Samuel Daniel,[1] who was born near Taunton, in 1562, was mainly passed as tutor, "servant," or friend and inmate of divers noble families, the Cliffords, Wriothesleys, and Herberts. He received education at Oxford, and was Master of the Revels and Gentleman of the Chamber to James I., as well as groom thereof to his queen. His *Delia* and his Senecan plays have been already noticed. Besides them he wrote in prose

Daniel.

[1] Poems in Chalmers; complete works in a very handsome edition by Dr. Grosart (5 vols. privately printed, 1885-96).

the also-noticed *Defence of Rhyme*, and a considerable *History of England* (1612-17). In verse he produced the *History of the Civil Wars* of York and Lancaster (1595-1609), in seven books of octaves; a Funeral Poem in couplets on the Earl of Devonshire; a Panegyric Congratulation to James; verse-addresses to Lord Henry Howard, to the Countess of Cumberland, to the Countess of Bedford, to his pupil Lady Anne Clifford, afterwards a countess, to Lord Southampton; *Musophilus*, a verse-defence of learning; some minor poems; and *The Complaint of Rosamond*, in rhyme-royal, the best of his narrative work.[1] Daniel is less unequal than Drayton, less given to merely prosaic statements of fact, and possessed of a command of high ethical reflection which inevitably reminds us of Wordsworth, and of hardly any one else. But he is apt to be dull; his lyrical power, though shown to great advantage in the choruses of his plays, in his masque *Hymen's Triumph*, and elsewhere, does not often pass into vivid or inspired verse in other kinds, and he almost entirely lacks Drayton's occasional fire, as well as his almost continuous *sinewiness*—the faculty which enables the author of the *Polyolbion* to grapple with and give a fair account of almost any subject. Daniel's meditativeness is apt to pass into languor, and except when he transports us, which is not very often, he is apt to send us to sleep.

An almost exact contemporary of both Drayton and Daniel in point of birth, and of one of them in death-date, was Joshua Sylvester[2] (1563-1618). Sylvester, though not exactly a successful man (he seems to have been engaged in business, and died secretary of a Company of Merchants at Middleburgh, in Holland), was very popular in his own day. In the next generation or a little later he became a byword for "conceit" and extravagance, and later again was totally forgotten. It is improbable that he will ever re-acquire any considerable number of readers, for his genius was in no sense original; he had neither the sententious weight and occasional grace of expression of Daniel, nor the vigour and frequent force of Drayton; and his chief work, a version of the *Divine Semaine* of the great French Huguenot poet, Du Bartas, was unluckily not suited to correct eccentricities of taste and extravagance of diction. Besides this mighty task, which extends to some thirty thousand verses in couplets, he translated other pieces from the same and other writers in French and Latin, and has left many thousand lines of more profane and original work, usually in couplets or quatrains, but sometimes in lyrical metres. Of these last Sylvester has no effective control; he has neither "cry" nor song in him.

Sylvester.

[1] He collected his poems repeatedly in his lifetime, and in 1623 the whole appeared.

[2] Ed. Grosart, 2 vols. privately printed, 1880.

But he is not destitute of a certain kind of poetical or at least verse-rhetoric, which, if it had been accompanied by a somewhat greater critical sense, might have ranked him higher among poets than he now stands. Such eminent oddities as the much-ridiculed one about snow "periwigging the woods" are not so fatal as the flatness which too often surrounds them.

Sir John Davies.

A very much better poet than Sylvester was Sir John Davies,[1] whose business as a lawyer caused him to abandon poetry in James's reign, but whose work, though all of it probably composed under, and some of it actually addressed to Elizabeth, is of the seventeenth rather than the sixteenth century in tone. Davies was of a good family in Wiltshire, and was born about 1569. He went first to Oxford and then to the Temple, lived for some considerable time in his University, and seems to have written most of his poems there. But he entered Parliament in the last years of Elizabeth, was much favoured by James, and became Attorney-General in Ireland, writing during his long residence there one of the most valuable books of the time on the country. Then he returned home, practised at the Bar, and did a good deal of work on the Bench, though he was never regularly made a judge, and died in 1626. We have from him in the way of verse *Nosce Teipsum* (1599), a poem on the Immortality of the Soul, in quatrains, which connects itself backwards with much of the poetry of Spenser, and forwards with the philosophic verse of More and Beaumont; a collection of acrostics in honour of Elizabeth, entitled *Astraea* (1599); and a poem of Dancing called *Orchestra* (1596). All three may, from their general description, sound uninteresting; all three, in fact, show both the extraordinarily diffused poetic power of the time and the large share of it which had fallen to this author. *Nosce Teipsum* is full of passages finely thought and expressed in a stately music; the hymns of *Astraea*, the initials of each making "Elizabetha Regina," and arranged in five-five-six-lined stanzas of octosyllables, full or catalectic rhymed, *aabab*, *aabab*, *aabaab*, have a grace which is beyond artifice, and manage their frequent double rhymes with singular skill. And lastly *Orchestra*, which is a whimsical praise of ordered movement of all kinds, with examples from history, cosmogony, anatomy, and everything else, is one of the crowning instances of Elizabethan power, by dint of sheer poetry, to transform fantastic conceit into matter of real value. Indeed, little known as Davies is, except to students, he is one of the most useful poets in English to show how very little the subject has to do with poetry.

[1] Poems in Chalmers; with additions in Grosart, 3 vols. Capell's remarkable *Prolusions* (1760), the first attempt to edit old English poetry critically in the eighteenth century, contains *Nosce Teipsum*.

Another Sir John, Beaumont,[1] the elder brother of Fletcher's partner, died not long after Davies, but was a much younger man, as he was born in 1582. He was, like his brother, a member of Broadgates Hall and of the Inns of Court, but seems to have lived chiefly at home in Leicestershire. His title of baronet was given to him by Charles I. only two years before his death in 1628. His principal work, *The Crown of Thorns*, a sacred piece well spoken of by contemporaries, seems to be strangely lost; his actual remains consist of *Bosworth Field*, a history poem, in couplets, and a few smaller poems on which his fame should rest. They are mainly of a sacred character, with some topographical pieces, complimentary addresses, and the like, with one remarkable exercise in, and apology for, the stopped couplet. We can but name here for the second time the voluminous pamphleteer in verse as well as in prose, Nicholas Breton;[2] for the first the writing-master John Davies of Hereford,[3] who sometimes has wit; Samuel Rowlands,[4] who very seldom has any; and the so-called "Water Poet," John Taylor,[5] 1580-1659, a waterman, publican, and pedestrian, who composed a vast quantity of doggerel, became in his own time and since a "curiosity of literature," and has had the very undeserved honour, denied to better men, of full reprint in our own times. Minor poets.

Superior to Taylor by far in birth, education, and talents, yet, with one single exception in the whole of his voluminous work, like him merely a curiosity of literature, is Richard Braithwaite, who has shared the partiality of antiquarian students for the miscellanists of this age.[6] He was a Westmoreland man, born near Kendal about 1588, and seems to have died quite late in the latter half of the century (1665? 1673?) at his wife's house of Catterick, near the Yorkshire Richmond. He was a good Cavalier. In Braithwaite's voluminous work, which, if completely edited, would probably extend beyond Taylor's or even Breton's, there is no sense of criticism. The rare good, the frequent bad, and the usual indifferent, jostle each other without any apparent discrimination on the part of their author. He, like others of his time, was a member of both Universities, beginning at Oriel and moving thence to Cambridge. But he seems to have passed most of his life in his own north country. His journeys

[1] In Chalmers. [2] Ed. Grosart. [3] *Ibid.*

[4] Partially printed for the Percy Society, more fully for the Hunterian Club.

[5] By the Spenser Society.

[6] As examples (they are not the only ones) of this may be mentioned the edition of *Barnabee's Journal*, given by Haslewood in 1820, and reissued by Mr. W. C. Hazlitt in 1876, with a very elaborate memoir and bibliography; and that of the *Strappado for the Devil*, and other poems by the Rev. J. W. Ebsworth in 1878.

thither from sojourns in London form the subject of the odd and (from Southey downwards to all good persons) delightful *Barnabae Itinerarium*, or *Barnabee's Journal*, in bilingual doggerel, Latin and English, arranged in six-lined stanzas of the trochaic rhythm, which revive the true doggerel spirit of Skelton with a really marvellous felicity. The morals are rather doggerel, too, but they can be taken dramatically.

Chapman's work, as a poet and translator, seems to belong chiefly to the middle period of his life. He began to publish his *Homer* (seven books of the *Iliad*) in 1598, and issued the *Odyssey* in 1616. Before the first date he had published his earliest poems, the *Shadow of Night*, *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, and the continuation of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, while the rest of them were scattered over his last thirty years.

Chapman.

The original poems of Chapman—the two first above mentioned, the *Tears of Peace* addressed to Prince Henry, *An Epicede* on the death of that Prince, *Andromeda Liberata* (an either very awkward or very shameless adjustment of the story to the divorce of Frances Howard, the murderess of Overbury, from Essex, and her marriage to Somerset), *Eugenia* (an epicede on Lord Russell), and some others—are by common consent among the obscurest in English. His metre is by no means so harsh as that of some of his contemporaries; but his phrase is often extremely rugged, and his expression, especially in the *Shadow of Night* and *Andromeda*, is twisted, carried on, reinvolved, and subjected to every kind of unnatural manipulation, so that the sense is never easy to follow without extreme and constant effort, and sometimes escapes even this. Beauties are by no means lacking—on the contrary, it would not be easy to open a page of Chapman in search of a motto without finding some striking, though quaintly-put conceit, or even some distinctly poetical expression. But lucid and finished combination of thought and expression within reasonable limits is almost everywhere to seek.

In his translations, on the contrary, these objections hardly apply at all. Besides the *Iliad*, and *Odyssey*, he did the minor works attributed to Homer, Hesiod, and some Juvenal. But these latter pieces are not equal to the *Odyssey;* and the *Odyssey*, which is in couplets, is not nearly equal to the *Iliad*, done in a splendid swinging fourteener, better able than any other English metre to cope with the body as well as with the rhythm of the Greek hexameter, and managed with extraordinary skill and success by the writer. For nearly a century it has been usual to quote Keats's sonnet as a sponsor for Chapman. The connection is interesting, but Chapman does not in the least require it. His translation remains, in the first

place, the only really good one of *Homer* into English verse; in the second place, the best translation into English verse of any classic, ancient or modern, except FitzGerald's *Omar Khayyam*.

This position would by some be challenged for the work of Edward Fairfax, the translator of Tasso, whose birth-year is unknown, but who died in 1635. He was an offshoot of the great Yorkshire family of his name, and spent his whole life in that county, troubled by witchcraft (see Scott's *Demonology*), on which he wrote a *Discourse* (1621) deserving to be associated with the great demonological work of the period, Reginald Scot's *Discovery*, though on the other side. His version of the *Jerusalem* (1600) is in octavos with distinct final couplets. It was long popular, receiving praise in the most diverse quarters from Waller to Collins, while, from its subject and style, it was dear to students of romance, being credited with smoother versification than the Augustan ages would allow to most work of the "last age." It is a book[1] still to be read with pleasure, but, unless its praises be taken warily, with a little disappointment. Its style is rather flaccid; the very stamp of line which commended it to Waller impresses a touch of prose; and Fairfax seldom has either the mazy beauty of Spenser's music or the panoramic power of his painting. Fairfax.

Thomas Campion,[2] whose name not so many years ago would have conveyed to but few readers any distinct idea of poetic quality, was born at an unknown date, and though he was certainly a member both of Cambridge and the Inns of Court, frequented both in unknown times and circumstances. Towards the end of Elizabeth's reign he was a popular physician in London, and connected in friendship and enmity with divers men of letters. He was buried at St. Dunstan's, Fleet Street, on 1st March 1620. He wrote, and wrote well, in Latin as well as in English, but his importance for English literature is of a double character, and the halves are curiously opposed to each other. We have from him, in the first place, besides some masques, certain collections of verses for music,[3] which contain much of the most exquisite rhymed poetry of the time; and, in the second place, a formal treatise[4] intended to show, by precept and example, that English poetry ought to be unrhymed, and arranged on ancient quantitative models. It is not fair, though it has sometimes been done, to regard Campion as an Campion.

[1] I use the edition of L'Estrange, London, 1682.

[2] Complete works, ed. Bullen (London, 1889). Songs to be found in the same editor's *Lyrics from Elizabethan Song-books*, two series (London, 1887-88), and in Mr. Arber's *English Garner*.

[3] *Book of Airs*, 1601; *Two Books of Airs* (1612?); *Third and Fourth Books of Airs* (1617?).

[4] *Observations on the Art of English Poesy*, 1602.

apostle of the preposterous hexameters, etc., which deluded Harvey, and all but seduced Spenser. He had seen the unsuitableness of these to English (which as he acutely observed is rebel to dactyls); and though he made some Sapphics, his own attempts are chiefly in very cunningly balanced iambic and trochaic unrhymed measures, some of which—such as the most often quoted,

Rose-cheeked Laura, come—

are at least the equals, if not the superiors, of Collins's "Ode to Evening" in this unnatural kind of abstinence from the greatest charm of English verse. In his "airs," on the other hand, he allows himself the full liberty of our poetical Sion, and with the very happiest results, literally dozens of his lyrics being among the most delightful of their kind. In fact, the difficulty is to find in the *Four Books of Airs* anything that is bad.

All these, however, with the exception of Sir John Davies, who might, with justice, be classed in tone, though not in language, with the Spenserians, lie outside the three schools which have been referred to above, and which make Jacobean poetry so extremely interesting both in itself and as a transition to Caroline. Of these we may take the Spenserian first, both as in origin the oldest and as lacking a living head and master.

The class contains some outsiders, anonymous and named, who come closest to Spenser on that side at which he himself touches the luxuriant style of such pieces as Shakespeare's first poems. "Sage and serious" as Spenser undoubtedly was, there is also no doubt that both his Italian originals and his own temper inclined him to the highly-coloured pictures of natural loveliness which are abundant in the *Faërie Queene*. One of the very best poems of this class, *Britain's Ida*, a piece describing the loves of Venus and Anchises ("Britain's," because the legendary Brutus was son of Aeneas), used to be printed among Spenser's own works,[1] though it did not appear till long after his death (1628), and is quite destitute of the allegorical and ethical purpose which always accompanied his most luscious imaginings. It has recently been assigned, without evidence, to Phineas Fletcher (*vide infra*), but is best taken as the work of a good uncertain poet. Beaumont's *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* (p. 337) and Barkstead's *Myrrha* belong to the same school—to which I should myself assign, for reasons of style and metre, the *Mary Magdalene* referred to in the note on p. 259.

The Spenserians: minor poets.

The general characteristics of Spenser, however, his allegorical

[1] It will be found in the useful one-volume Spenser, first published by Moxon and then by Routledge; also in the Aldine.

fancy on the one hand, and his ethical-pastoral tendencies on the other, with a certain copious and fluent diction which he introduced into poetry, are best represented by a group of Jacobean poets, two of them Cambridge men, two of the older university, who may be mentioned in the order in which they diverge from their pattern, Giles and Phineas Fletcher, William Browne of Tavistock, and George Wither.

The Fletchers.

The two first[1] belonged to the family already noticed, and were sons of the author of *Licia*. Giles, who, though he is said to have been slightly the younger, died first, was first known as a poet, and is usually mentioned before his brother, was probably born about 1585-88. But it is not certain that he was not older than Phineas, and even probable that he was, since he produced a poem on Elizabeth's death as early as 1603 at Cambridge, where he was a member of Trinity College. He took orders, and died vicar of Alderton, in Suffolk, in 1623. Phineas, who was educated at Eton, and proceeded thence to King's College, Cambridge, is said to have been born in 1582. He followed his brother's and father's profession, and was for very many years parson of Hilgay, in Norfolk, where he died at an uncertain date, perhaps not much before the Restoration, perhaps even later (but some say 1650).

Giles.

Giles takes his place in English poetry in virtue of a poem, not of the longest, entitled *Christ's Victory and Triumph*, in four books and some 250 stanzas of curious construction, and obviously modelled on the *Faërie Queene*. Fletcher has kept the Alexandrine termination, but left out one of the lines, so that the result is an octave of seven decasyllables and an Alexandrine, rhymed *ababbccc*. The device is not in itself very happy, and in particular the triplet at the end comes awkwardly. But Giles has written it with such a glow and fire of continuous inspiration, with such splendour of language and imagery, and occasionally (indeed very frequently) with single lines and passages of such force and beauty, that few poems of the kind by any but the very greatest masters can be read with equal pleasure. The picture and speech of Justice in the first canto with the contrasted portrait of Mercy; the description, in the warmest Spenserian style, and with a really exquisite insertion of octosyllables ("Love is the blossom where there blows"), of the temptress Pangloretta in the second; the overture of the third, which deals with the Crucifixion; and almost the whole of the fourth, with its glowing descant on Paradise, rank among the triumphs of the ornate and fanciful kind of poetry in English. The pre-Raphaelite effect of the poem is striking. It constantly reminds us, with allowance for

[1] Editions in Chalmers; by Grosart (privately printed) and by F. S. Boas (Cambridge, 2 vols.). *Christ's Victory*, ed. Brooke, London, *n.d.*

the difference of centuries, of the work of the Rossettis, brother and sister, in its combination of vivid and elaborate pictorial effect with gorgeous word-music. Nor is the thought inferior to the expression.

The work of the longer-lived Phineas is very much more voluminous, and very much more various—qualities which perhaps inevitably comport greater inequality. It is not easy to say that this poet was actually less pervaded with poetic spirit than his brother. He was, however, certainly less well inspired in the choice of his principal subject, *The Purple Island*, which is neither more nor less than an excessively elaborate allegory—unwisely magnified from one or two, not in themselves happiest, sketches of Spenser's—of the physical body of man. As a vehicle for this he arranged a still further modified stanza, which retained his brother's final triplet with its concluding Alexandrine, but cut off the last line of the quintet, so as to make a septet of quatrain-and-triplet effect with three rhymes. Individually, the stanza is even less successful than Giles's, while the poem has the additional disadvantages of a very awkward subject, and of much greater length (there are twelve cantos). The first half is mere physiology; and of course, though sometimes extremely ingenious, constantly grotesque, sometimes nearly disgusting, and deserving, at the best, the praise of an ill-judged *tour de force*. The last six cantos, which shift to the moral and intellectual qualities, are much more Spenserian and much happier. But even in the earlier part an abundance of really fine passages may be discovered, and in overtures, episodes, and other ornaments of his song, the author shows, perhaps his sense that ornaments were sorely wanted, but certainly his skill in supplying them. Besides *The Purple Island*, Phineas wrote a masque, *Piscatory Eclogues*, in which the following of Spenser blends with that of Sannazar, a curious sacred poem called *The Apollyonists*, well known, as indeed were all the poems of both the Fletchers, to Milton, and some miscellaneous pieces of divers kinds. Quarles called him the "Spenser of his age"; and though the compliment was rather commonplace and slightly ambiguous, there was truth in it.

Phineas.

William Browne,[1] whose literary merits have been rather variously judged, was born at Tavistock, some time about 1591, and seems to have been of a very respectable family. He went to Exeter College, Oxford, but took no degree before passing to the Inns of Court (Clifford's Inn and the Temple) in 1611. He was twice married, his first wife dying when he was very young, and a considerable time (some fifteen years) passing before he married the second. Before the latter date he returned to Exeter as tutor to

W. Browne.

[1] Poems not completely in Chalmers. Completely in two volumes of the "Muses' Library," ed. Goodwin, London, 1894.

a young nobleman, and somewhat late took the degree of M.A. After his second marriage he lived in Surrey, where both he and his wife had relations. He was dead in November 1645, when probate was granted to his widow, who had the odd name of Timothy, short no doubt for Timothea. But some say that his age, like his youth, was passed in Devon, and he pretty certainly was buried at his birthplace.

The claim which has recently been made of the exquisite epitaph, "Sidney's Sister," for Browne seems without a sufficient external foundation, and is entirely refuted by internal evidence. But his reputation did not need it. His chief work is *Britannia's Pastorals*, a desultory book in three divisions, which appeared (its first part at least) in 1613; *The Shepherd's Pipe*, a pleasing collection of eclogues; and *The Inner Temple Masque*, on the story of Circe and Ulysses, which opens with some verses of quite extraordinary beauty, the well-known "Steer hither, steer," and includes others not far inferior to them. Besides these, he has a fair number of miscellaneous poems, thoroughly justifying the adjective—being serious, sacred, jocular, elegiac, and almost everything. Browne's extreme variety is conditioned by a corresponding inequality, and he is undoubtedly liable to a certain fluent prettiness, which lacks dignity, and sometimes approaches too near to the namby-pamby. This touch of mawkishness, as well as better things, helps to bring about the singular likeness between Browne and Keats which has been noticed by most good critics. And among the better things must be noted a great similarity in versification, the lines, whether couplets or other, being broken up and "enjambed," after the fashion which, after nearly two centuries, Leigh Hunt revived and taught to Keats; while the way of looking at nature, and the ornate presentation of it—a presentation less stately than that of the Fletchers, but almost equally pictorial—give another point of contact. Browne is not nearly so great or so good a poet as Keats; he had the disadvantage of coming after, not in the full tide of, the poetic energy of his time. But he has a large share of the special charm of this Spenserian group, its combination of habitual ornateness with occasional simplicity, its beauty of image and phrase, its love of nature, if of a nature "tricked and frounced" a little, its sensuous yet in no sense impure passion, and its occasional bursts of rare and elsewhere unheard music.

The inequality, which is almost inseparable from the methods of this school of poetry, is again more perceptible in George Wither[1]

[1] Only to be found completely (if there) in the private reprints of the Spenser Society. His best things, *Philarete*, *The Shepherd's Hunting*, etc., are in Mr. Arber's *English Garner*. Not much of his *Hymns of the Church* and *Hallelujah*, reprinted by Mr. E. Farr in the "Library of Old Authors" (London, 1856 and 1857), is of his best; and most of his later verse and prose is rubbish.

than in Browne; while unfortunately Wither, unlike Browne, continued to write verse for many years after the faculty of writing had left him. He was born near Alresford, in Hampshire, in the year 1588, and was educated (but did not take his degree) at Magdalen College, Oxford. Then he entered an Inn of Court, and hung about London. His first book, the satirical *Abuses Stript and Whipt* (1613), procured him, nobody has ever discovered why, imprisonment in the Marshalsea. His famous "Shall I, wasting in despair" is said to date from this sojourn, and from the next decade till 1623 come all, or almost all, his really good poems—*The Shepherd's Hunting* (1615), *Fidelia* (1615), *Motto* (1618), *Philarete* (1622), and the *Hymns and Songs of the Church*. At the time of the publication of the *Hymns* he was exactly thirty-five. He lived to be nearly eighty, dying in 1667; and he constantly tried to "recapture his first, fine, careless rapture," but entirely failed except perhaps in some of the passages of his *Hallelujah* (1641). As his writing became worse and worse, and as in his later life, and during the Parliamentary troubles, he became a Roundhead, his name (generally spelt Withers) was used as a sort of byword of contempt by the partisans of monarchy after the Restoration, from Dryden downwards, and the contempt was echoed from generation to generation afterwards by persons who probably had never read a line of his. Only when the work of the early seventeenth century was unearthed for serious reading, when nearly two hundred years had passed, was it discovered what an exquisite poet had been for some hundred and fifty years classed with Bavius and Codrus. Yet it must be admitted that in his very best work, which is to be found in *Philarete*, though *Fidelia* and *The Shepherd's Hunting* run this close, he is unequal. The easy, fluent, Keatsian note of verse and of nature-painting which is observable in Browne is even better found in him; indeed, if genuine pastoral sweetness—the sense of the country and of country joys—is anywhere in English poetry, it is in Wither, who has much besides. But the very word fluency suggests the dangers which this verse coasts, and into which it sometimes falls.

Wither.

An addition to the poets of this school was made a few years ago by the printing for the first time of the works of William Basse,[1] who had been previously known, if at all, by some often-quoted lines about Shakespeare and Beaumont. Basse seems to have lived almost all his life in Oxfordshire as an honourable dependant of the families of Wenman of Thame and Norreys of Rycote. He may have been, though we do not know that he was, a member of the University, as well as an inhabitant of the

Basse.

[1] Ed. R. W. Bond, London, 1893.

shire. His initials, "W. B.," have led to some confusion with Browne, whose friend he was, to whose *Pastorals* he wrote commendatory verses, and whom he a good deal resembles in his own poems of the same kind, his *Urania*, his *Polyhymnia* (only surviving in fragments), and other pieces. But he is only a curiosity, and a very weak poet, though it may be a little stronger than another outsider of the Browne-Wither group, Christopher Brooke, whose poems have also been printed.

The Spenserians, however, though their work was to be continued even later in the great, or at least large, philosophical poems of More and Joseph Beaumont, and though we shall find a more profane echo of them in the most interesting *Pharonnida* of Chamberlayne, were in fact behind their time, and did not represent anything like its characteristic tastes and impulses. The lyrical impulse. These were to be found in two schools, or perhaps in one with two very different heads, who were Ben Jonson and John Donne. Both these men (we speak in this place, of course, of Jonson's non-dramatic work only) had an essentially lyric genius. It may seem strange that this should have co-existed with the rhetorical and declamatory tendencies of Jonson, and his bent to rough horseplay; with the satiric tastes, in singularly rough verse, of Donne, and his gift of grave, stately, and involved prose-writing. But we have already seen that the whole inspiration of the Elizabethan age proper tended towards the lyrical—especially if sonnets be included in lyric. And as the Euphuist tendency in phrasing, and the ever-growing thoughtfulness, inclining to melancholy in cast, of the later Elizabethan and Jacobean time disposed men ever more and more to conceit, lyric was also more and more the pet form in which they clothed their thoughts. Although the criticism of the time was not inclined openly to admit it, men of sense must have been more or less dimly conscious that a conceit in twelve cantos like *The Purple Island*, even in several pages of enigmatic couplets like *The Shadow of Night*, was somehow overparted. In a few stanzas of exquisitely tuned lyrical verse it to this day wins favour from all but the sternest judges; it could not then fail to delight even the sternest.

Ben Jonson's strictly poetical production was continued over the greater part of his literary life, and perhaps most of it dates from the time when he ruled as dictator over his band of "sons," the poets of his own latest day and the next age. He attempted, out of drama, nothing large; his plays at this time and his masques at that probably sufficed him, and, as has been pointed out in the last chapter, the masques, with *The Sad Shepherd*, are treasure-houses of poetry—dramatic only in a remote and unconnected fashion, and constantly delightful. But his actual poems are of sufficiently various kind. Few good words have been bestowed upon, Jonson's poems.

and perhaps even fewer are deserved by, his epigrams, in which unluckily he set a fashion followed by others, especially Herrick, who did worse than their master. Martial's foulness without his wit, and too often without the least share of his "concinnity" of style; the extravagant tone and temper of a section of the playwrights and satirists of the last days of Elizabeth; and worst of all, an affected surliness and rude hectoring dogmatism which it pleased Jonson to assume, and for which posterity has too often justly punished him by taking it as genuine—these are the chief characteristics of the epigrams. The bad habit of ticket names—Lord Ignorant, Sir Voluptuous Beast, Doctor Empiric—which disfigures the plays, is even more obvious here. If we read any with satisfaction, it is those in which the author takes a wholly different tone, as in the excellent one to "Camden, most reverend head," in the charming epitaph on his first daughter, and the exquisite flattery of Lucy, Countess of Bedford, in the dirges on Salathiel Pavy and Elizabeth L. H. And these excepted poems at once show us in Jonson certain characteristics, which are much more generally noticeable in the far finer and more equal collections called *The Forest* and *Underwoods*. The piece with which *The Forest* opens [1] is perhaps as indicative as any other of the manner and the example which Jonson was to set to his contemporaries and followers. For centuries English had been striving, often blindly, to achieve the peculiar clearness, proportion, completeness of expression which are characteristic of the two classical languages. It had succeeded in other things as great as this, perhaps greater, but in this it had not succeeded. Now it did succeed. The thought in the verses quoted is only a conceit, and though a perennially natural one, yet for that reason not even new. But it is expressed perfectly, neither with the redundant ornament and imagery of the school we have just left, nor with the obscure, though precious flickers, the carbuncle-glimmer in darkness, of that to which we shall shortly come. The wording and phrasing are classical, rather of the late than of the early classics perhaps, but still classical, with nothing extravagant in their richness, nothing starched or prim in their grace.

The quality of grace has often been denied to Jonson, but of a surety wrongly. The pieces referred to above in the epigrams, this, the "Celia" songs, including the famous paraphrase from Philostratus, "Drink to me only," the magnificent epode "Not to know vice at all and keep true state," very much of the Charis collection, written when the poet was fully fifty, the song "Oh do not wanton with those eyes," the elegy in the *In Memoriam* stanza, and many others, dis-

[1] Entitled "Why I write not of Love," and beginning "Some act of Love bound to rehearse."

play grace in the very strictest sense, and the list might be largely extended. Jonson is by no means the only poet who has thus united masculine and feminine characteristics—indeed, the union is rather the rule than the exception in poetry—but he is certainly an instance of it.

The influence of John Donne[1] was even more potent, though it is extremely difficult to understand the precise manner in which it was exercised. This very great and very puzzling poet was born in London about the year 1573, and was connected on his mother's side with the Heywoods and Sir Thomas More. Donne. He appears to have been a member of both Universities and of Lincoln's Inn. It is not certain whether he was actually a Roman Catholic at any time, but his family were of that faith. He travelled and served abroad, and perhaps spent his fortune in so doing. On returning to England he became a member of the household of the Chancellor, Sir Thomas Egerton, afterwards Lord Ellesmere, and having made a clandestine marriage with Anne More, a relation of the family, was sent to the Tower, but soon enlarged. He took up his abode with more than one other gentleman, and did some diplomatic work. At last, in 1615, when he must have been over forty, he took orders at the King's suggestion, but at first without any very lucrative result. His wife died in 1617. After some more diplomatic work, he was made Dean of St. Paul's in 1621, and died ten years later in 1631.

It seems on the whole improbable that any part of Donne's poems,[2] except a very small one (*The Anatomy of the World*, a poem on Prince Henry, etc.), was ever printed before his death, and the earliest known edition of the larger part of them dates from 1633. On the other hand, it is perfectly certain that some of them must have been written nearly forty years earlier, and it is clear that many, if not most, were known to men of letters who cared about poetry during the whole of the last half of Donne's life and more. There is even probability, though not certainty, in the supposition that a fling of Drayton's (in a poem where he mentions almost every prominent poet among his contemporaries *except* Donne) at poems "which by transcription daintily must go Through private chambers," refers to Donne. At any rate, it is beyond controversy, from references in Jonson's *Conversations*, and from the poems written by Carew and others on Donne's death, as well as from internal evidence, that he was at least on a level with Spenser and Jonson himself as a master of Jacobean poetry, while in some ways his manner and matter

[1] Poems in Chalmers, vol. v. ; ed. Grosart, 2 vols. privately printed, 1873 ; ed. Chambers, 2 vols. London, 1896. Ed. Grierson, 2 vols. Oxford, 1912 (the best).

[2] An alleged early edition of the *Satires* cannot be traced.

are even more characteristic of that poetry and of its Caroline successors.

The Spenserians had made conceit in a manner their own ; but as they had produced no poet who was at all equal in intellectual power to their master, they had mostly treated it from the outside, fantastically, though sometimes very happily, describing or dressing up no matter what subjects in a brocaded garb of gorgeous and (when they could manage it) harmonious phraseology. Jonson was setting beside this loose, florid romanticism a severer ideal of classical grace, and was perfecting lyric phrase ; but Jonson's imagination rarely soared into strange or distant regions, and in particular his love-poems, though sometimes warm, are never metaphysically passionate. Donne, on the other hand, seems to have been born to combine all elements of the Renaissance spirit—the haunting meditation on death, the passionate attention to love, the blend of classical and romantic form. And he added a peculiar mystical charm, the result of the taste for conceit spiritualised, refined, and made to transcend. This it is which we observe eminently in his later prose contemporary, Sir Thomas Browne, and which communicates their distinguishing peculiarity, though not by any means always their distinguishing charm, to his sons, the so-called metaphysical poets, many indeed of whom owe something of a divided allegiance to Jonson and himself, but who are generally nearer to him in spirit, to Jonson in form.

The form of Donne is indeed the most puzzling thing about him. Some of its peculiarities are beyond all doubt due to the mere fact that he never printed most of his poems, and that of hardly any can we be sure that we have a definitive edition from his own hand. More perhaps should be charged to the certain fact that in his later life he repented much of the matter of his earlier poems, and the probability that he abstained with deliberation from publishing them. But this will not account for the whole phenomenon ; and the roughness was undoubtedly to some extent deliberate. That Donne had any intention of attempting a new prosody there is not the least reason for believing. In his Satires, where the roughness is most perceptible, there can be no doubt that the imitation of Persius, which is so noticeable in all the Elizabethan and Jacobean satirists, accounts for a good deal. In his other poems, when they leave the satire, the mere metre is as a rule correct enough. It is only that the intensity and fulness of the thought does not lend itself to actually smooth expression, without more labour than the writer seems to have cared to expend upon it.

This intensity and this fulness appear with no very great, though with some, difference of degree in the various divisions of Donne's work—the Songs and Sonnets, the Elegies, the Epithalamia, the

Divine Poems, the Verse Letters, the Epicedes and Obsequies, *The Progress of the Soul*, *The Anatomy of the World*, and the Satires. The last named are, in consequence of Pope's rather blundering patronage, the best known, but they are the least interesting part of Donne's work, displaying the conventionality and exaggerated indignation of the whole class to which they belong. The Elegies are most remarkable for the undisciplined exuberance of feeling to which Donne, outspoken as were many of the writers of his day, gave more unhesitating voice than almost any of them. The Verse Letters are full of autobiographic interest, and in some of the more elaborate pieces, the "Storm" and "Calm," which rejoiced Ben Jonson, very remarkable exercises in elaboration. The Epicedes, Obsequies, etc., are notable examples of the special ability of the time in these things. *The Progress of the Soul*, which seems early, is a singular poem, a cross between *The Purple Island* and *The Shadow of Night*, deeply shot with Donne's own peculiarities, but not exhibiting them in the most amiable and profitable form. We are thus left with the Songs and Sonnets, and *The Anatomy of the World*, which, though the latter, in its two "anniversaries," is certainly much later than most of the former, and serves to some extent as a pendant and palinode, yet complete each other in the most remarkable fashion. The Songs exhibit Donne's quintessenced, melancholy, passionate imagination as applied, chiefly in youth, to Love; the Anniversaries, the same imagination as applied later to Death, the ostensible text being the untimely death of Mistress Elizabeth Drury, but the real subject being the riddle of the painful earth as embodied in the death of the body. The Songs are, of course, in different lyrical forms, and the Anniversaries are in couplets. But both agree in the unique *clangour* of their poetic sound, and in the extraordinary character of the thoughts which find utterance in verse, now exquisitely melodious, now complicated and contorted almost beyond ready comprehension in rhyme or sense, but never really harsh, and always possessing, in actual presence or near suggestion, a poetical quality which no English poet has ever surpassed. It is from these poems that the famous epithet "metaphysical" (which Johnson not too happily, and with a great confusion between Donne and Cowley, applied to the whole school) is derived; and as applied to Donne it is not inappropriate. For, behind every image, every ostensible thought of his, there are vistas and backgrounds of other thoughts dimly vanishing, with glimmers in them here and there, into the depths of the final enigmas of life and soul. Passion and meditation, the two avenues into this region of doubt and dread, are tried by Donne in the two sections respectively, and of each he has the key. Nor, as he walks in them with eager or solemn tread, are light and music

wanting, the light the most unearthly that ever played round a poet's head, the music not the least heavenly that he ever caught and transmitted to his readers. If this language seem more highflown than is generally used in this book or than is appropriate to it, the excuse must be that every reader of Donne is either an adept or an outsider born, and that it is impossible for the former to speak in words understanded of the latter.

CHAPTER IV

JACOBEAN PROSE—SECULAR

Bacon—His life—His writings—His style—His use of figures—His rhetorical quality—Jonson's prose—The *Discoveries*—Their essay-nature—Protean appearances of essay—Overbury's *Characters*—The Character generally—Burton—The *Anatomy*—His "melancholy"—His style—Selden—The Authorised Version—Minors.

THE central figure in prose of the entire Jacobean period is undoubtedly Francis Bacon.[1] He holds this position a little in spite of himself; for it was his own opinion, apparently deliberate and persistent, that English was an untrustworthy make-shift, likely to play tricks to any book written in it, and that the only secure medium for posterity was Latin. And he also holds it in spite of the fact that he had more than reached middle life at the date of the King's accession, and that his one contribution of unquestioned importance to English literature, as distinguished from English science and philosophy, was first published long before that time. For the really characteristic editions of the *Essays*—those which are not shorthand bundles of aphorisms, but works of prose art—date much later, and the whole complexion of Bacon's mind and of his matured style has the cast of Jacobean thought and manner.

Bacon.

He was born in January 1561, the son of Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper under Elizabeth, and of Anne Cooke, whose sister married Lord Burleigh. His elder brother, Anthony, a man of weak health, who died in middle life, having talents and knowing Montaigne, has been thought not unlikely to have suggested the Essay to his junior. Francis was sent first, at the age of twelve, to Trinity College, Cambridge, then, when he was

His life.

[1] The editions of Bacon, both complete and partial, are extremely numerous, those of the *Essays*, the work which here chiefly concerns us, especially so. Of these latter may be singled out the "Harmony" of the various issues by Mr. Arber in his *Reprints*, and the excellent annotated library edition by the late Rev. S. H. Reynolds (Oxford, 1890).

fifteen, to Gray's Inn, and spent three years, till 1579, at Paris in the suite of Sir Amyas Paulet. He was called to the Bar in 1582, and became a bencher of his Inn in 1586. Having his fortune to make, he had already entered Parliament as member for Melcombe Regis in 1584, sitting afterwards for Taunton and Middlesex. He had early been rather a favourite with the Queen, but he probably did not ingratiate himself further with her by elaborating arguments for toleration and comprehension in ecclesiastical matters, and in 1593 he actually took the Opposition side in the House. He had become the friend of Essex, but the favourite, owing either to Bacon's want of courtiership or to secret opposition from Burleigh, who seems (or at least was thought by his nephew) to have been jealous of him, could not do much, though he gave Bacon a very valuable present of land. After Essex's disgrace, Bacon acted as counsel against him in each of the trials, for misconduct in Ireland and for rebellion. But this baseness, which, after much dust of argument, is now practically admitted, did him very little good, and it was not till after the accession of James that he received any solid proofs of royal favour. He was knighted, received a small pension, and in 1607 became Solicitor-General. This post he held six years, and became Attorney-General in 1613, a privy councillor some years later, and in 1617 Lord Keeper. Next year (all these latter preferments came to him from the favour of Buckingham) he obtained the still higher dignity of Chancellor and a peerage as Baron Verulam. He was afterwards created Viscount St. Albans, but was never, as he was once commonly, and still is sometimes, called, "Lord Bacon." He held the Chancellorship for more than three years, and then fell a victim to the jealousy of the Commons, the enmity of Sir Edward Coke, the desertion of Buckingham, and, it must be added, his own malpractices. He was accused, and practically pleaded guilty to the charge, of taking gifts from suitors, or at least allowing his servants to take them, and the Peers sentenced him to a fine of £40,000, imprisonment, and exile from court. The fine was remitted and he was not long kept in prison, but his banishment was maintained, and he lived thenceforward chiefly at his seat of Gorhambury. He caught cold in March 1626 and died at Lord Arundel's house near Highgate. His character does not much concern us, but there is little doubt that, though personally good-natured, he had in a rather eminent degree all the bad qualities of Renaissance politicians except debauchery, and perhaps vindictiveness. He was profuse and greedy, ostentatious and mean, a born intriguer and tuft-hunter, and though it is probably a mistake to represent him as completely sympathising with the Machiavelian doctrine of the right of the brave, bold, and cunning man to attain his ends by any means, he had much too

strong a tinge of this doctrine. Nor can it be said that, except scientific enthusiasm and a certain patriotism, he displays many of the nobler sentiments.

The other vexed question of the precise nature and amount of his philosophical acquirements concerns us, if possible, even less, and we have to deal with him only as a great English prose-writer. In this capacity he published, in 1597, his first small batch of very succinct *Essays* (a work increased by successive instalments to fifty-eight of a much more elaborate character in 1625); the *Advancement of Learning* in 1605; and in the last years of his life, after his disgrace, the *History of Henry VII.*, *The New Atlantis*, and some *Apophthegms*, besides some other chiefly minor works. His philosophical and scientific treatises were almost all written in Latin, in which language he even published an enlarged edition of the *Advancement* under the title of *De Augmentis Scientiarum.* His writings.

It is at once true of Bacon that no man has a more distinct style than he has, and that no man's style is more characteristic of its age than his. It has, indeed, been attempted to show that he had more than one style; but this does not come to much more than saying that he wrote on a considerable number of different subjects, and that, like a reasonable man, he varied his expression to suit them. Always when he is most himself—in the *Essays* as well as in the *Advancement of Learning*, in the *Henry VII.* as well as in any other English work—we come sooner or later on certain manners which are almost unmistakable, and which, though in part possessed in common with other men of the time, are in part quite idiosyncratic. All Jacobean authors, and Bacon among them, interlard their English with scraps of Latin, and constantly endeavour to play in their English context on the Latin uses of words. All aim first of all at what is called pregnancy, and attain that pregnancy by a free indulgence in conceit. Few, despite the stateliness which they affect, have any objection to those "jests and clinches" which even Jonson seems to have thought of as interfering with the "noble censoriousness" of Bacon himself. In all a certain desultoriness of detail, illustration, and the like—as if the writer had so full a mind and commonplace-book that he could not help emptying both almost at random—is combined with a pretty close faculty of argument, derived from the still prevailing familiarity with scholastic logic. His style.

But Bacon, in addition to these characteristics, which he shares with others, has plenty of his own. His sentences, indeed, do not attain to that extraordinary music which is seen in some of Brooke and Donne, which is not wanting in Burton, which is the glory of

Sir Thomas Browne, the saving grace of Milton's best prose, and the almost over-lavished and sometimes frittered-away charm of Jeremy Taylor. He had begun, as we see in the earliest form of the *Essays*, with a very curt, stenographic, sharply antithetic form; and though he suppled and relaxed this afterwards, he never quite attained the full, languorous grace of Donne or Browne. But he became gorgeous enough later, the glitter of his antithesis being saved from any tinsel or "snip-snap" effect by the fulness of his thought, and his main purport being by degrees set off with elaborate paraphernalia of ornament and imagery. In the successive versions of the *Essays* we see the almost skeleton forms of the earliest filling out, taking on trappings, acquiring flesh and colour and complexion in the later, while in some of the latest, the well-known ones on Building and on Gardens especially, the singular interest in all sorts of minute material facts which distinguishes him comes in with a curiously happy effect. Both the pieces just mentioned are much more like description of scenery in the most elaborate romance than like ideal suggestions for practical carrying out, drawn up by a grave lawyer, statesman, and philosopher.

His use of figures.

No point in Bacon's literary manner is more characteristic, both of his age and of himself, than his tendency to figure. Such a sentence as this in the *Advancement*, "Nay, further, in general and in sum, certain it is that *Veritas* and *Bonitas* differ but as the seal and the print; for truth points goodness; and they be but the clouds of error which descend in the storms of passions and perturbations,"—would show itself to any person of experience as almost certainly written between 1580 and 1660 in the first place, while in the second it would at least suggest itself to such a person as being most probably Bacon's. Although all the world in his day was searching for tropes and comparisons and conceits, the minds of few were so fertile as his; and it is not unworthy notice that even the apparently bold, even startling, change of metaphor from the "seal" to the "cloud" is in reality a much more legitimate change than it seems.

His rhetorical quality.

It will stand to reason that such a style is displayed to the best possible advantage by bold and richly-coloured surveys of science in general, like the *Advancement*, or by handlings of special points, like the *Essays*. Whether Bacon was really "deep," either in knowledge or in thought, has been disputed; but he was certainly one of the greatest rhetoricians, in the full and varied sense of rhetoric, that ever lived. His knowledge, deep or not, was very wide, ever ready to his hand for purposes more often perhaps of divagation than of penetration. His command of phrase was extraordinary. No one knows better than

he either how to leave a single word to produce all its effect by using it in some slightly uncommon sense, and setting the wits at work to discern and adjust this; or how to unfold all manner of applications and connotations, to open all inlets of side-view and perspective. That he dazzles, amuses, half-delusively suggests, stimulates, provokes, lures on, much more than he proves, edifies, instructs, satisfies, is indeed perfectly true. But the one class of performances is at least as suitable for literary exhibition as the other, and Bacon goes through the exhibition with a gusto and an effect which can hardly be too much admired. Fertile in debate as almost all his qualities have proved, there is at least one of them about which there can be little difference of opinion, and that is his intense literary faculty. It was entirely devoted to and displayed in prose—he wrote very little verse, and that little is nothing out of the way. But in prose rhetoric—in the use, that is to say, of language to dazzle and persuade, not to convince—he has few rivals and no superiors in English. His matter is sometimes not very great, and almost always seems better than it is, but this very fact is the greatest glory of his manner.

In those characters of style which, not to the utter exclusion of chronological order, but with a certain prerogative right over it, determine the arrangement of literary history, three writers hold with Bacon in Jacobean prose the place which we have assigned to Donne, to Jonson, and to Spenser after his death in Jacobean verse. Of these Donne and Jonson again appear, a duplication of itself sufficient to prove the high and too-long-ignored position of these writers in English literature; the fourth is Robert Burton. But Donne, for sufficient reasons, will be kept to the next chapter. We shall deal with Jonson and with Burton here.

The independence and the importance of Ben's position are shown, among other things, by the fact that, while in the general history of English prose he makes a distinct advance, he appears among the writers of his own time as isolated, as, indeed, almost reactionary. The gorgeousness of Jacobean phrase, the involution of Jacobean thought, the tricks of both which almost approach the heraldic sin of "colour upon colour," do not appear in him; he is of his time chiefly, if not only, by his learning and by the compression and pregnancy of his style, in which latter points he approaches and sometimes almost excels Bacon in his most serried and least ornate moments. Unfortunately, the amount of Jonson's prose that we have is by no means large, some having certainly, and much probably, perished (with verse as well) in a fire which destroyed the contents of his study. Besides prefaces, dedications, and the like, we have only an *English Grammar*, valuable, but

Jonson's prose.

of course not for points of style, and the invaluable collection of notes, short essays, and *pensées* which, never having been published in his lifetime, goes by the alternative titles of *Sylva*, *Explorata*, *Timber*, or *Discoveries made upon Men and Matter*—the most usual, and perhaps the best, appellation being simply *Discoveries*.

The *Discoveries*.

These notes, 171 in number, each titled with a short Latin heading, and varying in length from three or four lines to the bulk of a good short essay, have much superficial and some real resemblance to the work of Bacon, whose intimate and, as far as it was in his nature, admiring friend Ben was. But a minuter examination shows that, except the compressed and pregnant tendency mentioned above, there are few points of real likeness, and that Ben belongs to an entirely different school from that of the Chancellor. The license of quip and jest is absent; the coruscating metaphors, more brilliant perhaps than luminous, but brilliant enough, are absent likewise; the volleying antithesis, though present, is more heavily shotted and less often blank cartridge; the unusual, and intentionally unusual, employment of Latin or Latinised terms is less for ornament and more for use. In short, Ben Jonson, allowing for his age and circumstances, belongs to the plain, not the ornate, section of prose-writers; he is at daggers drawn with Euphuism in the larger as well as in the smaller sense. Yet he does not revert to or imitate that kind of plainness which Ascham set in order, and which Hooker, by sheer genius for proportion and harmony, made more elegant than ornateness itself. He advances upon it; we find in him distinct shadows before, echoes in anticipation of, the plain style as it was to be reformed by Dryden, and to continue till the first quarter of the nineteenth century, with sentences of moderate length, symmetrically balanced, deriving little appeal from abundance of antithetic adjectives, but with the antithesis promoting, not obscuring, character and directness. Not, of course, that Jonson wholly escapes the figurative passion of the time. When he speaks of man "making a little winter love in a dark corner," we hear the contemporary and the friend of Shakespeare and Bacon. In such a sentence as "In being able to counsel others a man must be furnished with a universal store in himself to the knowledge of all Nature; that is the matter of seed-plot; there are the seats of all argument and invention," we have the mixed style; the first half might have been written by the other Johnson, or by any eighteenth-century writer of the higher class; the second brings us back to the fanciful and dreamy seventeenth. But often for whole sentences, and not very seldom for whole passages, the nervous, uncoloured, to some extent *sterilised*, fashion of the prose of 1660-1800 appears with hardly a touch of archaism about it. And we must remember that Jonson's

influence continued mighty for at least two generations after his death; that it was very strong with Dryden himself, the literary prophet not merely of the second of these generations, but of the whole eighteenth century.

Moreover, the matter of these *Discoveries*, as well as the aphoristic or axiomatic form of much of them, was such as was likely to impress their style on the more thoughtful readers, those who were actual or possible writers themselves. They indeed illustrate (though they do not bear the name and contain one direct gibe[1] at the form) the growing attraction and importance of the essay, which Bacon alone had as yet adopted by its own title, but which, as we shall see both in this chapter and in others, was, either under its own name or under others, gradually to absorb a greater and greater share of the attention of prose-writers and prose-readers. The farrago of the book is of the most miscellaneous character. Ethical remarks are, of course, numerous—the seventeenth century was nothing if not ethical—but they are found side by side with a body of discourses upon rhetoric, with valuable passages of criticism on individual writers—Spenser, Shakespeare, Bacon, Montaigne, and of course the ancients—with a remarkable tractate in little on education, and with notes on arts, politics, history. Indeed, Ben is the essayist whom he affects to slight, and his adoption of the plainer style may without too much fancifulness be taken as a sort of pointing of the vane in the direction almost of Addison, certainly of Dryden.

Their essay-nature.

The temptation of the essay, though under another name, shows itself as strongly, and with not less literary influence, though with far less literary accomplishment, in the famous *Characters* of Sir Thomas Overbury.[2] Their author was a man by no means specially estimable or specially amiable, but recommended in the first place by his performance in a kind which was of growing popularity, in the second by his miserable end. He was born of a respectable family in Warwickshire in 1581, went to Queen's College, Oxford, in 1595, took his Bachelor's degree, and passed to the Middle Temple. He travelled, and seems to have been a *protégé* of Robert Cecil, afterwards Lord Salisbury, but unluckily for himself became connected later with the favourite Carr, afterwards Earl of Somerset. He was knighted in 1608, and

Protean appearances of essay.

[1] "Such [*i.e.* desultory and ill-digested] are all the essayists, even their master Montaigne."

[2] *Works*, ed. Rimbault (London, 1856). The late Mr. H. Morley published in the "Carisbrooke Library" a very interesting collection of *Character-Writers of the Seventeenth Century*, including Overbury, Earle, Butler, and much minor matter.

attained a very great reputation for ability. But he set himself against his patron's marriage with Lady Frances Howard, the divorced Countess of Essex, one of the worst women of whom history gives record; and having, as it seems, also contrived to offend Anne of Denmark, was sent in May 1613 to the Tower, nominally for refusing an ambassadorship. For about four months attempts, equally bungling and remorseless, were made to poison him, and after suffering horrible tortures from them he is said to have been finished by vitriol. The matter came to light some three years afterwards, and though the chief criminals, Carr and his wife, escaped with imprisonment, divers under-strappers, including the Lieutenant of the Tower and Mrs. Anne Turner, famous for her yellow starched ruffs, were executed, Bacon conducting the prosecution. But a great deal remained unexplained, and suspicion, which has never been quite removed or at all confirmed, attached to the King's physician, Dr. (afterwards Sir) Theodore Mayerne, and to the King himself.

This, however, is matter of history, not matter of literature, and it is only mentioned here because Overbury's singular promotion first, and his horrible and apparently mysterious fate afterwards, no doubt helped the reputation of his works. Yet intriguing, braggart, and insolent as he seems to have been, he must have had that art to divine the tendencies of the time which frequently belongs to men of the world. His *Observations on the Low Countries* (1609) is a fair ordinary State paper of the old-fashioned kind; his *Wife*, a poem in sixains, seems to have acquired interest from the probably false notion that it was written to discourage Carr from marrying Lady Frances; his *Crumbs fallen from King James's Table* purport to be, and probably are, mere reports of the utterances of the wisest fool in Christendom. They are chiefly interesting because they contain the crude matter of Rochester's saying on the King's grandson: "Some men never speak a wise word, yet do wisely; and some, on the other side, never do a wise deed and yet speak wisely." But he would now be entirely forgotten if it were not for his *Characters*.

They were not—indeed, none of his works seem to have been—printed during his lifetime, and from the first they bear ascription to "Sir Thomas Overbury *and his friends*," while in successive impressions from 1614 they were increased in number from twenty-one to a hundred, including divers specimens of the old "News from this or that place" which had been common in the Elizabethan pamphlet. The most famous pieces that are at least probably Overbury's own are the "Milk Maid," constantly quoted in anthologies, the "Affectate Traveller," and the "Mere Fellow of a College." With the limitations to be observed of the Character generally, they are very closely

Overbury's *Characters*.

connected with the pamphlet already noticed, and were continued throughout this reign and later. But they have some characteristics which, when we compare them with Earle and other followers (see next Book), seem likely to be Overbury's own—a sharp observation expressed with antithetical conceit, a hard, presumptuous, unamiable wit, and a general superciliousness which accounts in part for Overbury's fate.

The introduction of the Character, however, is a very important thing. It came, of course, from Theophrastus, and during the whole of the seventeenth century, in France as well as in England, indeed all over Europe, continued to be an exceedingly favourite form of the essay, which was in so many ways overrunning literature. "Humours" in prose *belles lettres* as well as in drama, were the fashion of the time, and the very staple and substance of the Character is a "humour" in the seventeenth-century sense. The advantage of the style was that it at least invited, and, as we shall see in Earle's case, successfully, to accurate study and artistic reproduction of its subject; the disadvantage that it lent itself to hardening of types—An Amorist, A Braggadochio, A Pedant, and hundreds more—to dressing them up simply out of the writer's own head, without any real induction from individuals, and also to certain conventionalities of expression. In Overbury particularly the forcing of Euphuist imagery to enliven the phrase, and the abuse of antithesis to give it point and "snap," are unmistakable, and to readers not of the time excessively tedious. The only thing to be said is that these excesses in one direction or another are peculiar to no time, and that from each, bad as it is in itself, ingredients of universal style have been picked up. The antithetic and pointed character helped to *crisp* style, to save it from languor and complexity, as well as constantly to invite the writer to study from the life.

The Character generally.

More generally recognised than these, and perhaps equally significant of the general tendencies of the time, but with less direct influence on the form, though he had enormous influence on the matter, of English prose, is Robert Burton. We do not know as much of this author as might be expected, seeing that he was not of the elusive race of London Bohemians, but resident in a great University during almost the whole of his life, and that his work was at once, and with men of letters enduringly, popular. He was born in Leicestershire of a good family in 1577, and after education at the grammar schools of Nuneaton and Sutton Coldfield, went to Brasenose College, Oxford, in 1593. After six years he was elected to a studentship at Christ Church, which he held till his death in 1641, as well as the livings of St. Thomas in the University town,

Burton.

and of Segrave in Leicestershire. He appears never to have resided out of Oxford after his entrance at Brasenose, so that he had something like fifty years of uninterrupted study to provide him with the extraordinary learning that appears everywhere in his great and only work, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*,[1] first published in 1621, and much altered and increased in successive editions during the last twenty years of his life. His death has sometimes been attributed to suicide, but on merely fanciful grounds, and without any direct evidence to that effect.

The Anatomy of Melancholy has sometimes been thought to have been suggested by a book called *The Anatomy of Humours*,[2] written by one Simeon Grahame, and published at Edinburgh in 1609. Examination of this, however, shows absolutely no similarity of style, thought, or treatment, Grahame's book being in most respects similar to the Elizabethan pamphlet in a sort of rambling railing at actual or supposed vice and folly, with free quotation in verse and prose. The title may to a careless observer seem more suggestive, but the fact is that the term "anatomy" (as it needs no more than two such well-known examples as Lyly's *Anatomy of Wit* and Stubbes's *Anatomy of Abuses* to show) had been a bookmaker's catchword for more than a generation before Burton wrote. Indeed, there are very few books in literature more original than his, in that best sort of originality which, exhibiting certain general features of time and race, stamps these with an individual and unmistakable expression.

The *Anatomy.*

The two features which are in a sense common to Burton and to all the men of his time are his learning and his melancholy. The former, in prose and verse, in matter ostensibly serious and matter ostensibly light, has been already sufficiently shown to be *the* Jacobean characteristic. It may be doubted whether any age since, and it is certain that no modern age before, has had so much solid reading; for the range of mediæval possibilities in this respect was very much narrower, and if modern reading has still further widened, the widening is, it may be suspected, more than made up by scrappiness and want of depth. "Democritus Junior," the *nom de guerre* which Burton chose, has, in the enormous and most carefully arranged treatise which he has devoted nominally to Melancholy and its cure, but really to the life and thought of man, amassed such an extraordinary amount of reading that probably no follower of his has ever tracked him completely through the maze of canonists, physicians, historians of the Middle Age and Early Renaissance, not to mention

[1] Constantly reprinted, but never thoroughly edited. There is no handsomer or better form than that of Shilleto and Bullen (3 vols. London, 1893).

[2] Reprinted for the Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1830).

almost the whole of the classics and a very considerable number of his own contemporaries. He shows his learning, not by mere references, though of these, both looser and exacter, he is singularly profuse, but by a unique tissue of actual citation, or paraphrase, or both combined, which he does not lay upon his own canvas in the ordinary fashion of quoting, but weaves and infuses into it in the strangest and subtlest manner.

Nor is his "melancholy" itself much less a characteristic. There is no reason to believe that it was, despite Ben Jonson's excellent anticipatory raillery in *Every Man in his Humour*, affected, and even that raillery itself shows that it was a popular symptom, thought worthy of affectation by fools, in the wise men of the time. It is by no means wanting in Ben himself; it is the special mark of Donne, perhaps the most gifted man of letters next to Shakespeare whom we notice in this Book, and of Browne, the equal of the most gifted that we shall have to notice in the next. Even in Bacon, though kept back by his sanguine philosophical hopes, his personal ambitions, and his touch of Philistinism, it is not far behind the foreground, and it is evident in his master, and the master of many others at this time—Montaigne. It was, in fact, the natural reaction following upon the high and fantastic hopes of the earlier Renaissance, and ushering in the prosaic and slightly vulgar limitation to low aims of the late seventeenth and most of the eighteenth century. In Burton it shows itself not so much in the sense of the unattainable infinity of passion which we find in Donne, of the high feeling of mystery and *altitudo* that we find in Browne, as in a sort of quiet but intense *tacdium vitae*—a wandering of the soul from Dan to Beersheba through all employments, desires, pleasures, and a finding them barren except for study, of which in turn the *taedium* is not altogether obscurely hinted. And it is almost unnecessary to add that in Burton, as in all the greatest men, except Milton, of the entire period from 1580 to 1660, there is a very strong dash of humour—humour of a peculiar meditative sort, remote alike from grinning and from gnashing of teeth, though very slightly sardonic in its extreme quietness and apparent calm.

His "melancholy."

With writers of this kind, and it may be added pretty generally of this time, it is difficult to keep strictly to those considerations of form and expression which the history of literature proper demands, so subtle is the connection between their temper and its utterance. But if it were possible to abstract Burton's merely formal characteristics, they would still be of the most interesting character. To accommodate the wide purpose, indicate the voluminous citation and allusion, and infuse the subtle spirit already

His style.

described might seem almost impossible, yet it is done with wonderful success and with such charm that those who have once acquired, or who naturally possess, the taste for Burton's style find enjoyment in it almost greater than that given by any other writer except Sir Thomas Browne himself. Its sentences are frequently of a length daring even for that age; and the clauses, largely consisting of the illustrative quotations or paraphrases above referred to, are strung together with a still more audacious looseness, the effect being not unfrequently that of a man thinking aloud without taking the trouble to insert the ordinary copulas and syntactical mortar. Yet Burton is never obscure, and when he has no need of a long sentence he can write a short one as nervous, as terse, as distinctly articulated as anything of Jonson's own.

Like Burton, and even more than Burton, John Selden outlived the reign of James; but his characteristics are rather Jacobean than Caroline, and his most noteworthy work was written well before the accession of Charles. He was born in 1584, the son of a Sussex yeoman, was educated at Chichester and Oxford, and became a famous "black-letter lawyer" in the Temple. His political life did not begin till the next reign, and does not greatly concern us; it is enough to say that he was one of those respectable but not very statesmanlike persons who undermined the royal authority till they saw it begin to totter, and then were aghast at the tottering and tried in vain to prop it up. In 1614 he had published his famous treatise on *Titles of Honour*, and in 1618 his *History of Tithes*—two works of extraordinary learning but somewhat cumbrous in style. He is now, except as a writer for reference, not reading, remembered almost entirely by his *Table Talk*,[1] collected by his secretary and published (1689) long after his death in 1654. This book not merely contains a great deal of practical though slightly Philistine wisdom, and a certain amount of sharp aphoristic wit, but also exhibits the same difference, when compared with Selden's published work, as that existing between the writings and the sayings of Johnson, to whom, indeed, though on the other side in political and ecclesiastical beliefs, Selden bore much resemblance. It is curious too to compare the book with Ben Jonson's *Discoveries* and to see how in each the Essay-tendency displays itself, many of the sections in the *Table Talk* being, in fact, essays in little.

Selden.

Selden was no literary critic, and his remarks on the Authorised Version of the Bible (1611) show an extraordinary insensibility to the merits of that mighty book. That it is the greatest monument by far of Jacobean prose there can be very little doubt, and the objection

[1] Ed. S. H. Reynolds, Oxford, 1892.

which Selden himself made, and which has been rather unwisely echoed since—that it does not directly represent the speech of its own or any time—is entirely fallacious. No good prose style ever does represent, except in such forms as letter-writing and the dialogue in plays and novels, the spoken language of its time, but only a certain general literary form, coloured and shaped not too much by contemporary practice. The extraordinary merits of the Authorised Version are probably due to the fact that its authors, with almost more than merely human good sense of purpose and felicity of result, allowed the literary excellences of the texts from which they worked—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—and those of the earlier versions into English from that called Wyclif's to the Bishops' Bible, to filter through their own sieve and acquire a moderate, but only a moderate, tincture of the filter itself in passing. No doubt the constant repetition, universal till recently and pretty general fortunately still, of the text in the ears of each generation has had much to do with its prerogative authority, and still more with the fact that it still hardly seems archaic. But the unanimous opinion of the best critics from generation to generation, and still more the utter shipwreck of the elaborately foolish attempt to revise it some years ago, are evidences of intrinsic goodness which will certainly be confirmed by every one who, with large knowledge of English at different periods, examines it impartially now. There is no better English anywhere than the English of the Bible, and one of its great merits as English is its retention of the "blend" character of all the truest English products.

The Authorised Version.

Certain minor writers of James's reign have at this time or that acquired admission to literary history, nor is it perhaps necessary to oust them. The chief historian of the reign, next to Knolles, was Sir John Hayward, a lawyer, who was born in 1564 at Felixstowe, went to Pembroke College, Cambridge, died two years after the accession of Charles, and wrote a *History of the First Year of Henry IV.*, a *History of Edward VI.*, and other historical and some theological work. Samuel Purchas (1577-1626) continued the work of Richard Hakluyt (1533-1616), the great collector and redactor of Elizabethan voyage and travel, as editor and populariser of geography with less, but still considerable, charm of writing; and Sir Henry Wotton, the author of some famous and charming poems, was a good letter-writer and produced rather numerous but seldom singly important prose tractates on a wide variety of subjects.

Minors.

CHAPTER V

THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE ENGLISH PULPIT—I

Great pulpit oratory necessarily late—Function of sermons, 1600-1800—Andrewes—Ussher—Hall—Donne

THAT the title of this chapter belongs of right to the seventeenth century nobody but a paradoxer is ever likely to dispute. Even the eighteenth, which exaggerated the tendency of almost every century to look down on its immediate predecessor, had not much doubt about this. Nor will those who have followed the history here given of English literature, and especially of English prose, be surprised either that the particular development was so late or that it came when it did. In the first place, it is impossible that any, and especially that pulpit, oratory should be early, because it requires the previous development of a varied prose style. Moreover, the tradition of the Mediæval and early Renaissance Church, which made vernacular preaching distinctly a *concio ad vulgus*, and encouraged the preacher to descend even to horseplay to make himself intelligible and popular, was not very favourable to the creation of a pulpit style at once flexible and dignified. The Reformation brought little improvement at first, for if the audience were learned it encouraged a mere tissue of scholastic and erudite citation and argument, if it were unlearned there was an inducement to the rude and often blasphemous railing which disgraced both sides. Before Hooker there is hardly an English preacher whose work is of the first class as literature. We must go back to Latimer, and earlier still to Fisher, before we find any with such pretensions; and Latimer is too homely, Fisher too formal, and both too archaic to have them admitted except by allowance.

Great pulpit oratory necessarily late.

Hooker, however, who did so much for English, was too much occupied in writing, and during the greater part of his priesthood had too uneducated audiences, to leave many sermons; and the great tradition of the English pulpit and of controversial and other English divinity of the best literary kind begins later. The amount of really

noteworthy work of this kind composed for more than a century is enormous. During this century, and even during much of the next, sermons were extremely popular, and indeed discharged one part of the function of the modern newspaper, as the playhouse did others. They were also as a rule much longer than modern discourses in England, and they were far more used for reading than they have been for nearly a century. In fact, it may almost be said that the printed sermon, for some two hundred years, represented the whole modern furnishings of the circulating library to most women who had either education or character, and a large part of it to many men, even men of the world.

Function of sermons, 1600-1800.

We must therefore, from the beginning, proceed by selection; and it so happens that in this particular department selection is less injurious than in any other, at any time save the Middle Ages. The subject-matter of sermons, though admitting the widest individuality of particular handling, must always be within certain limits the same; and in hardly any kind of writing do famous and popular models tend to reproduce themselves so faithfully. From Hooker and Andrewes to Newman, the reader or hearer who knows the styles of the leaders knows those attempted, though no doubt often clumsily, by hundreds of followers, and except for special purposes he may therefore neglect these latter. On the present chapter we shall take as representatives Andrewes, Ussher, Hall, and Donne. The second division of the subject, to be taken up in the next Book, will be more populous.

Lancelot Andrewes[1] was born at Barking in Essex in 1555, and was educated at Merchant Taylors' School and Pembroke College, Cambridge, of which he became Master. He was from the first much patronised, and successively became Prebendary of St. Paul's and Westminster, Dean of the last-named cathedral under Elizabeth, and Bishop of Chichester, Ely, and Winchester under James. He was very prominent at the Hampton Court Conference and in the translation of the Bible, and though, like most prelates of the time, he perhaps dabbled more in court intrigues (specially in that *bolgia* of crime, the divorce and remarriage of Lady Frances Howard) than might be desired, he has never been justly judged a sycophant. He died in 1626. Of his learning and of the strange fervency and intense eloquence of his Private Devotions there have never been two opinions; his Sermons have excited more dispute. The charge against him is said to have been put early by "a Scotch nobleman," when the bishop preached in

Andrewes.

[1] The standard edition of Andrewes is that in the Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, Oxford, 1841-54. The Greek and Latin *Devotions* have been frequently translated and given separately, most recently by Dr. A. Whyte (Edinburgh, 1896).

Holyrood Chapel. "He rather plays with his subject than preaches on it." The criticism was by no means unfounded, though it would apply to nearly the whole of the preachers of Andrewes's time, except Hooker himself, in England. Perhaps it may be put better by saying that the sometimes far-fetched and romantic symbolism and imagery which in Donne among the earlier, in Taylor among the later, preachers of the school produce such miraculous effects, are in Andrewes crude and not finally transformed by art. No doubt his immense learning, in which he excelled almost every one of that learned time except Ussher, aggravated the evil.

James Usher (or rather Ussher) himself was more a writer than a preacher, the most erudite of an erudite time, and one of the most voluminous authors of a time when most authors were voluminous.

Ussher.

But he cannot be omitted here, and he escapes the blame not quite unjustly passed upon Andrewes by never attempting flights or rhetoric at all. He did not wish his sermons to be published, though they were; his great chronological and historical works, which gained him a practically enduring fame, are mainly in Latin. In English he wrote chiefly on Celtic Antiquities, especially those of an ecclesiastical complexion, as well as on the burning questions of the time—the Protestant-Papist controversy, divine right, and the like. His style, like that of so many men of his day, is largely conditioned by his method of argument, which consists, though by no means wholly yet very mainly, in appeals to authority and citations from the inexhaustible store of his vast reading. Only the idiosyncrasy of a Burton can infuse writing of this kind with any particular tincture of style. But Ussher is always plain and clear. Neither his temper nor his immediate purpose inclined him to any superfluity of ornament, and when he gets free from citation and has a paragraph or two to write, as the common phrase is, "out of his own head," he rather exemplifies the Ascham-Hooker tradition than the more conceited manner of his own day. He was born in Dublin in 1581, and was nephew of Stanyhurst, the eccentric translator of Virgil. He was one of the first alumni of Trinity College, Dublin, became Fellow, and gave himself up to study, becoming Professor of Divinity in his University in 1607, Bishop of Meath in 1620, and Archbishop of Armagh in 1625. When Ireland became convulsed by the Rebellion, he went to England, and was for some time preacher at Lincoln's Inn. Though a steady Royalist, he was not molested by the Parliament or by Cromwell, and died quietly at Reigate in 1656.

With Bishop Hall[1] we get into a higher sphere of literary

[1] *Works*, ed. Wynter. 10 vols, Oxford, 1863.

accomplishment. His verse was entirely of the previous or strictly Elizabethan period, while his prose was entirely of this or the next. This early verse was purely secular; but the succeeding prose was by no means purely theological, though its most noteworthy division of the secular kind, the *Characters of Virtues and Vices*, seems to have been composed (1608) with a view to use in sermons. These Characters precede Overbury's in point of time, and though they never became so popular, excel them in simplicity, being often quite as pointed, and as a rule not nearly so contorted and fantastic. Hall's subsequent writings during his long, busy, and (till the evil days of rebellion) prosperous life, were extremely multifarious—sermons, meditations, autobiographical pieces, controversial tracts (such as those, for instance, which brought upon him Milton's clumsy invective), expository matter. In his sermons and casuistical work he particularly affects a plain but energetic style of attack on the consciences and hearts of his hearers; and this element of directness is also generally prominent in his politico-ecclesiastical polemic. In his meditations he is more flowery and figurative, as is reasonable enough. But at no time can he be said to share to the full the tendencies of his age in this particular direction, being too much of a fighter when he is not a mere meditative moralist. Perhaps also he may exemplify the rule to which his enemy Milton is one of the not many exceptions, and the great writer whom we are shortly to mention another, that those who write both poetry and prose usually write the latter with some restraint, while the very ornate or fantastic prose writers are chiefly those who cannot express themselves in verse.

Hall.

This, however, as has just been hinted, is by no means the case with our last and greatest exemplar. Few are more of a piece in poetry and prose than Donne,[1] and much of what has been said of his verse will apply equally to his prose. This consists of a large body—some two hundred—of Sermons, a considerable number of Letters, a short and curious tractate to prove that in certain circumstances suicide may not be a sin, some Essays in Divinity, some Devotions, and a few miscellaneous treatises. All his work, however, even in prose, whatsoever it be called, essay, sermon, letter, or what not, is again strikingly like itself and strikingly unlike anything else, being, like the verse, saturated and pervaded by Donne's peculiar melancholy. The expression of this seems to be as easy for him in prose as in verse, or, to speak more justly and

Donne.

[1] Ed. Alford, 6 vols. 1859 (not good and incomplete). Dr. Jessopp's little edition of the *Essays* can sometimes be picked up. Since this History appeared Mr. Gosse has given the *Letters* and a much needed *Life* (2 vols. 1899).

accurately, he succeeds in elaborating a prose style just as suitable for it as is his style in verse. He is clearer in prose than in verse except (curiously enough) in his Letters, which often display almost as much metaphysical conceit as the most recondite passages of his poetry. But he has the three great characteristics of Jacobean writing—the learning, the profundity, and the fantastic imagination. And the profundity is here not merely real, but of a depth rarely surpassed in English, while the fantastic imagination becomes something more than merely fantastic. The "kingship" which Carew ascribed to Donne is at least as noticeable in his prose as in his verse, and though the realm over which he rules is rather a Kingdom of Night than of Day, a place of strangely-lit gloom rather than of mere sunlight, it is a kingdom of wonderful richness and variety. It may be questioned whether Donne's very best passages are exceeded, even whether they are equalled, by any English prose-writer in the combination of fulness and rarity of meaning with exquisite perfection of sound and charm of style. In these latter points he is at least the equal of Jeremy Taylor at his best, and though Jeremy Taylor is no shallow thinker, his thought is a mere pool to the oceanic depth and breadth of Donne's. There is a certain quality of magnificence, too, in Donne beside which the best things of Taylor are apt to suggest the merely pretty. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Donne knew when to let a great thing alone; and few of them, for instance, would have been content to let such a phrase as the likening of the coming of God to the soul "as the sun at noon to illustrate all shadows, as the sheaves in harvest to fill all penuries," without frittering away its massive and complete effect into subdivisions and added epithets, into appendices and fringes of thought and expression.

Moreover he, as Hooker in his very different style had had before him, but as hardly any one else, had the sense of the paragraph —of the crescendo and diminuendo of cadence required to wind it safely and melodiously from start to finish. His sentences are sometimes too long, they are too often made to do the work of the paragraph itself; but this is often more a matter of punctuation than of real structural arrangement. And whether they be called sentences or be called paragraphs, there linger round each of them the glimmer of an unearthly light and the notes of a more than earthly music.

INTERCHAPTER VI

It has been frequently pointed out that the connection of the present Book with the last and next is of a kind which will not be repeated, and which has not been earlier found between the successive divisions of this work. All three are wholly busied with what is usually and rightly, from one point of view, called Elizabethan Literature. All three are mainly busied with the productions of a not extraordinarily long lifetime—1580 to 1660; while such a lifetime as that of Fontenelle would have taken a man from Wyatt's days almost to the publication of the *Hesperides*, from that of *Euphues* to the death of Milton, or from the birth of Shakespeare to the Restoration. Yet the separation into three, besides avoiding cumbrousness and confusion of arrangement in other ways, enables us to bring out the three divisions of rise, of culmination, and if not exactly of decadence, yet of a long and gorgeous sunset, in a very satisfactory fashion.

There can be no real difficulty in according to our present stage the title of culmination. We have indeed lost two or three, but only two or three, of the very greatest names of the whole period. To the reign of James (though no thanks to James himself) belong the greatest work of Shakespeare, almost the whole work of Bacon, the great bulk of the more accomplished work of the minor dramatists, a volume of exquisite non-dramatic poetry, and a body of most interesting, if still partly inorganic, prose.

It is no doubt in the department of pure poetry that the period, partly by accident, partly not, contrasts least favourably both with its predecessor and its successor. That Spenser is dead at its beginning, and Milton a boy at its close, is itself not wholly accidental. For Spenser, though he could have added to the volume of our delight, would probably have given us nothing new in kind, had the Irish rebels allowed him to reach his seventy years in peace; and Milton would not have been quite Milton without the Jacobean period itself behind him. We have seen what the character of that period was in poetry, and how Spenser's own influence, with Donne's and Jonson's, was at work in it, shaping and preparing the forces,

accumulating the matter, which were to result on the one side in the massive structure of Milton, and on the other in the exquisite filigree of the Caroline lyrists. But we can here better perceive in the work of the three themselves, as in that of their followers, the special Jacobean profundity, its weight of thought, and its slight consequent weariness. The "bloomy flush" of the Elizabethan period proper has fled; the conceit remains, but it is graver, less childlike; the play of words continues, but it is changing into the play of thought, sometimes hardly to be called play, so laborious and Cyclopean is it.

It follows that the actual poetry of the reign, that which exclusively or especially belongs to it, is somewhat less charming than that of the poets who owe more direct allegiance to Elizabeth or to Charles. Yet the best of the songs of the dramatists date from this time; the masques of Ben Jonson and others contain, in the good old phrase, "poetry enough for anything"; we cannot find out of Spenser and Rossetti more gorgeous things than the best passages of the Fletchers; anywhere perhaps sweeter things than the best trifles of Ben, of John Fletcher, of Wither, of Browne; anywhere at all such mysterious melody as that of Donne. Yet, since we find most of those who are thus gifted dating back from Elizabeth or persevering to Charles, we may be justified in reserving for the middle stage, here as elsewhere, the special qualities of weight and thought.

There can be no doubt at all that this place is the proper one for its prose. As we have seen, Euphuism in the large sense, ornateness, gorgeousness, horror of the obvious, has altogether the upper hand as compared with succinctness, directness, appeal only to power of matter and proportion of arrangement. Yet Ben Jonson relies very mainly on these last, and no one, not even Bacon, succeeds in manipulating the dictionary like an organ after the fashion of the great Caroline writers, unless indeed it be Donne, to whom here as elsewhere the universal monarchy of wit is subject. But the prose of James's reign, putting aside the half-accidental magnificence of the Authorised Version, must rest its claims on the fantastic and splendid, but not fully-organised, form of Bacon and Burton, on the weighty and sterling matter of both these and of Jonson.

In neither case had a perfection of style been reached. The author of the *Essays* and the author of the *Anatomy* have discarded the more childish things of Euphuism; but they have not quite attained the full perfecting of its best things that Browne and Taylor were to show. Ben Jonson has recoiled from this same Euphuism (always using the term as a sign and symbol rather than as a limited designation), and has sometimes achieved a plain style almost perfect in its way. But he had been busied with other things, and was perhaps not equipped with sufficient versatility to make a prose

writer absolutely of the first class. The others, except Donne, who did but trans-prose his verse and trans-hallow his profanities, are minors.

Yet in both directions the period, especially for so brief a one, did more than its fair share in the mere furthering of style, in doing its stage on that circular but always interesting journey. And in point of kind as distinguished from style that establishment of the Essay, in more forms than one, which we have seen was a matter of the very greatest importance, that development of the sermon which we have also seen, a thing of importance hardly lesser. The *opuscle* as opposed to the *opus magnum* was thus, in matters sacred and in matters profane, promoted to distinct literary rank; and in each case literature was carried from the study into other apartments of the house, if not even into the street.

But undoubtedly the very greatest accomplishment of the time was its accomplishment in drama. After making every reasonable allowance for the obscurity which rests on so many of the exact dates of the Elizabethan theatre, we can be fairly certain that the larger number of its consummate examples date from the first quarter of the seventeenth century—most of the best work of Shakespeare, all, with one exception at each end, of the best work of Jonson, all the work of Beaumont, of Fletcher, and probably most of the best work of all the rest save Shirley, belong to it. Moreover, in what follows there is little or nothing *new*. The effects which have been achieved with such gigantic expenditure of genius, if not exactly of criticism, first by the University Wits and Shakespeare in his initial period, then by Shakespeare and his great contemporaries in this special time, are merely repeated, weakened, and at last frittered away. It would hardly be rash to say that of the really great plays included in the general list of the Elizabethan drama, not merely four out of five or nine out of ten, but nineteen out of twenty belong to this time. Yet we need, in this special place of summary, say less of it than we have said of the Elizabethans proper, and still less than we must say when, after the next Book, we sum up the whole great epoch of which it forms a part. For the centre of any period partakes necessarily more of the characters of the two ends than they do of it. In so far as the Jacobean age deserves a description of qualities to itself, that description must be what has been more than once given. Depth and weight appear in it as they appear in none other; yet does it not lack finish and grace.

BOOK VII

CAROLINE LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

BLANK VERSE AND THE NEW COUPLET

The central period of English prosody—Distribution of Caroline poetry—Milton—His life—The earlier poems—*Comus*—The blank verse—*Lycidas*—Sonnets—The longer poems—Their blank verse—Their matter—Milton's place in English prosody—Cowley—His couplets—The lyrics—The *Pindarics*—Denham—Waller—The "reform of our numbers."

WE have traced the gradual growth of prosody, which is the distinguishing feature of poetry, steadily onwards from the first appearance of English as a blend of Teutonic, Romance, and other elements; and we have seen how, after the strange and not yet accounted-for changes in the fifteenth century, a fresh start was made about the middle of the third quarter of the sixteenth. After this, for some fifty years, almost every style of poetry was tried. But one style—not of poetry proper but of the mixed kind called drama—had more effect than all the others put together by adjusting metre to the exigencies, not of mere recitative, not of formal music, but of spoken language in every relation and circumstance of life, comic and tragic, impassioned and ordinary. This great period in drama was in 1625 nearing its close, but its work was already done. And while, on the one hand, the peculiar influence of Jacobean thought and style in general, and of the three great poets in particular, resulted in a continuance of poetry differentiated from the Elizabethan only by an increased tendency to the metaphysical in tone and the lyrical in form, the dramatic current mixing with that of general poetry produced two things which were practically new—the use of blank verse for non-dramatic purposes in

The central period of English prosody.

original poetry, and the altered form of the couplet, which between them, gradually ousting in great part lyrics and the stanza, were to dominate English verse for nearly a century and a half.

Distribution of Caroline poetry.

We can hardly do better than treat the poetry of the period under these two heads, but we shall have to deal with them differently. The poets who are mainly distinguished for their work in blank verse or couplet, with Milton at their head, show such differences from their immediate successors, headed by Dryden, that, save as far as Milton is himself concerned, we shall have ceased dealing with them at the accession of the second Charles. But, with some special and striking changes of tone, the poets, partly "metaphysical" in subject and mainly lyrical in form, persevere long beyond that date, and even, with Sedley and a few others, beyond Charles the Second's death and into the next century. We shall, therefore, in this and the next chapter, cover unequal spaces of ground; but the chronological inequality will be more than compensated by the logical exactitude which will be obtained, even though some of those with whom we shall deal belong in a manner to both divisions. Milton is at once an exquisite, though too little copious, poet of the school of Jonson and of Spenser (never quite of Donne) and an innovator in pure poetry who has none but dramatic masters. Cowley never entirely knows whether he is a metaphysical Pindaric, or a lyrist, or a common-sense coupleteer. Chamberlayne, to take still a different class, writes exclusively (or almost so) in couplets, but his couplets are not in the least of the new kind. We shall class them all according to the division to which each, either in the bulk of his work or in its main tone and temper, belongs, always noting when they cross the boundary line. But keeping the boundary itself will enable us (as we could not so well otherwise do easily or without endless confusion and repetition, proviso and warning) to indicate the falling line and the mounting in English poetry during the last three-quarters of the seventeenth century.

Milton.

John Milton,[1] who, though his position as the greatest or not the greatest of English non-dramatic poets is open to question, occupies unquestionably the greatest place among such poets as an influence and model, was a Londoner by birth, and was born in Bread Street on 9th December 1608; but his family belonged to Oxfordshire. His father, a money-scrivener (a profession now extinct, or rather absorbed, but then a cross between banking and law), resembled his son in combining Puritan sympathies in religion with strong literary and artistic tastes. The only other member of

[1] Editions innumerable, but the larger (3 vols. London, 1890) and smaller ("Globe") of Professor Masson stand before all others.

the family who is remembered was the poet's younger brother Christopher, afterwards Sir Christopher, who became a judge and was a very strong Royalist. Milton entered St. Paul's School in 1620, and went thence five years later to Christ's College, Cambridge, where his personal beauty and correct moral character were observed, but where his insubordinate and unaccommodating temper seems to have got him into trouble with the authorities. He was once rusticated, but took his degrees in due time, becoming M.A. in 1632, at the end of the usual seven years. His father had bought a property at Horton in Buckinghamshire, and there Milton remained in unmolested and unprofessional study for six years, during which he produced most (some is even earlier) of his early verse, and displayed, as some think, nearly his highest poetical genius, if not his full poetical power. The indulgence of his father next allowed him a tour abroad, and leaving England at the beginning of 1638, he spent the great part of two years chiefly in Italy. When he came home he settled in Aldersgate Street, and, having the full Renaissance interest in education, acted as schoolmaster or tutor to his nephews and others.

His life.

During the twenty years of civil commotion he wrote, except a few sonnets, no poetry, but was fertile in controversial prose, which will be dealt with in another chapter. He married in 1643; the unlucky bride's name was Mary Powell, of a good Cavalier family in Oxfordshire, with which Milton had been long intimate; but the marriage was extremely ill assorted, and in a few weeks his wife left him and went to her parents. This desertion Milton construed into a reason for divorce, and argued this point out in several tracts, which naturally caused a good deal of scandal. She returned in 1645 and died in 1652, leaving him three daughters, whose relations with him were not more happy than their mother's. Meanwhile his tract-writing, now devoted to purely political matters, and especially the defence of the execution of the King, procured him the post, under the Commonwealth, of Secretary of Foreign Tongues, that is to say, for diplomatic correspondence in Latin. He lost his eyesight in the same year in which his first wife died, and married a second in 1656, but she, the "late espoused saint" of his sonnet, died also in 1658. At the Restoration he hid himself, but was not molested, and settled near Bunhill Fields. He married a third time in 1663, this time more successfully in comfort and permanence. The publication of his great epics (see below) followed at no long intervals, and he died on November 1674, and was buried at St. Giles's, Cripplegate.

Milton's character was not amiable, and its harshness was no doubt accentuated, both in life and letters, by his singular want of humour; but it only concerns us in so far as it affects his writings.

These, as has been seen, fall under three unusually well marked periods: the first including all the early poems up to *Lycidas;* the second fertile in prose, but yielding no poetry except most of the Sonnets; the third giving the two *Paradises* and *Samson Agonistes.* We must say something about each of these periods and its results before endeavouring to touch briefly the whole question of Milton's place as a poet. His precocity has sometimes been admired, but this doubtful gift was not in any very great measure his. The few poems which we have dating earlier than his coming of age are scarcely better than a very large quantity of minor verse. The first unmistakable signs were shown by the great *Ode on the Nativity* (1629). About this there can be no doubt whatever, except in the minds of those who so dislike what is called florid poetry that they are blinded by the flowers. Both in the stanza-prelude, and still more when the actually lyric part begins, the note to ears that can hear is as new as it is exquisite. Even Spenser had not written like it; even Spenser had not written anything more individual and more delightful in word-music; while, if we compare it with what had been done or could be done by the best poets then alive—Drayton, Chapman, Jonson, Donne, Wither, the Fletchers, etc.—we shall find a note of witchery which only Donne could have surpassed, while the soft harmony of the motion is altogether different from Donne's less mellifluous touch. The *Ode on the Nativity*, as the herald's cry of a new great poet, is a test of the reader's power to appreciate poetry. It is perhaps sufficient proof of Dr. Johnson's initial disabilities as a critic of seventeenth-century verse that he does not so much as mention it. For the famous pair, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, no one has ever had anything but praise, though some have hinted that "Penseroso" is not very choice Italian. Even Dr. Johnson could feel their universal charm, nor is there much need of commenting on what is matter of universal knowledge and universal consent. But it is worth while to note that even at this early time Milton displayed his wonderful science of versification in the handling of the octosyllable, catalectic and full, and also his complete command of whatever expression he needs. He has little of the conceit of his contemporaries, but he has almost more than their average learning, and yet he manages to treat it as lightly as possible. These same characteristics are noticeable in the few other short pieces which we have from this time, especially the exquisite fragments of the *Arcades.* But before the poet took leave of the muses for a less delightful mistress, he was to produce two substantive poems, *Comus* and *Lycidas*, either of which, but especially the former, would have settled the question of his place in poetry. *Comus* was written in 1634 as a masque to be presented

The earlier poems.

(with music by Lawes) at Ludlow Castle before, and by the children of, Lord Bridgewater, President of Wales; *Lycidas* not till just before Milton's departure for Italy, and nominally to celebrate the death of Edward King, a Cambridge contemporary and friend. The last is deeply tinged with the coming blackness of political and ecclesiastical faction; the first is almost free from it, though not quite so free as *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. But both are of the very first order of poetry.

Comus.

Comus (not so called by Milton), though avowedly a masque, lies between that kind and the lyrical dramas of Jonson and Fletcher, of whom Milton was a diligent student. The scenery and decorations are of much less account in it than in the masque proper, and the story, though not very elaborate, is more solidly and substantively dramatic. The argument, suggested partly by the *Odyssey*, partly by Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, is extremely simple. Two brothers, wandering with their sister in a wood haunted by Comus, Circe's son and imitator, part from her in search of a guide and shelter. She falls, bewitched by art but protected by her virtue from any real harm, into the enchanter's power, till he is driven off by her brothers and an attendant spirit (half Mentor and half Ariel), and the charm is reversed by Sabrina, the river-nymph of the Severn. But on this slight and little "incidented" theme, while treating even the characters symbolically and typically rather than as individuals, Milton has contrived to broider the most exquisite tissue of poetry, both in blank verse and in lyric measures. Nothing quite like the former had yet been seen. The author is much under the influence of that later form of the playwrights' blank verse which admits the redundant syllable very frequently, and he has boldly borrowed the system of trisyllabic equivalence, which in them was certainly to a great extent, and may be suspected to have been almost wholly, based on the mere necessities of conversation. His own verse *tirades*, or passages which are only in form dialogue, are really independent pieces of poetry. By these means and others he also elaborates that "verse paragraph" the introduction of which was to be perhaps his greatest contribution to the English *Ars Poetica*. The redundant syllable is indeed rather abused, and it is in this, and perhaps in this only, that *Comus* is inferior to *Paradise Lost*. But it is difficult to use the word inferior in any connection with such incomparable work as the Spirit's overture and description of his discovery of the Lady's danger, her soliloquy before she meets Comus, the Elder Brother's fine if rather declamatory praise of chastity (saturated with memories of Marlowe's versification and *homoeoteleuta*), the argument of Comus and the Lady, and the poet's account of Sabrina. But the lyric parts (which Sir Henry

The blank verse.

Wotton in a letter to the author justly called *ipsa mollities*) are certainly not inferior, and the last hundred and fifty lines repeat the success of *L'Allegro* and its fellow in metrical effect, with more variety and an even higher and more airy strain.

Nor do the graver cast and the more disputable material of *Lycidas* injure, save to very unhappily constituted persons, its poetical effect. Its two hundred lines are arranged on a decasyllabic basis which is never exceeded, though it is allowed, somewhat on the principle of a choric ode, to descend to eights, and even to sixes. Further, while the piece rhymes throughout (save for a few lines left "in the air," and yet, by a perfect miracle of art, contributing to the music as their sound floats unanswered), the rhymes are ranged neither regularly in couplets nor regularly in stanzas, though, for instance, the close is a complete octave, *abababcc*. The whole has an extremely cunning system, not strophic but symphonic, so that the music, though never broken, is never complete in any section till the whole has closed. As an elegy deriving from the Alexandrian-Sicilian school *Lycidas* has in its turn served as model to other English dirges of the first interest, especially *Adonais* and *Thyrsis;* but it exceeds both in variety and uniformity of merit, though it is not the equal of *Adonais* in loftiness of thought and in the poetical quality of certain passages. No English poem exhibits a more exquisite harmony and variety of numbers, or a more extraordinary science of rhyme, while very few of anything like the same length have a greater number of signal phrases memorable for thought or music or both. Indeed, except the untimely speech of St. Peter, which is at the very best a vigorous piece of satiric verse, there is not a passage and hardly a line which is not mere and sheer poetry. The poem, moreover, adds to the knowledge of Milton's powers in several minor ways, especially in regard to his extraordinary skill in the use of names. Something of this had been seen before, but not to the extent of the wonderful triplet—

Lycidas.

> Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
> Where the great vision of the guarded mount
> Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold.

We care nothing about Bellerus or Namancos or Bayona as persons or places, but we feel, we know, that as words they are right and indispensable. And the passage also exhibits two other main devices of Milton's, the putting of the adjective, especially a monosyllabic adjective, after the noun, and the cunning interchange of syllables in adjective and substantive by pairs.[1]

1 { "Great vision," adj. = 1 syll., subs. = 2.
  { "Guarded mount," adj. = 2 syll., subs. = 1.

The batch of sonnets which forms a bridge over the twenty middle years of Milton's life has varied interest. They are very few in number; they do not, even with those in Italian, which fall out of our purview, reach the end of the second dozen. The history of their reputation is strange, for even after making every possible allowance for the "point of view" and for the depreciation of the sonnet as a trifling thing, we cannot now understand the contempt with which the eighteenth century regarded them as not even good of their kind. They are historically of great importance, because they mark that return from the true English or Shakespearian form of the sonnet to the Petrarchian model which has been generally, though not universally, observed since. This, it must be repeated, though a perfectly legitimate consequence of Milton's devotion to Italian, was in no sense a change from corrupt to pure. The one kind of quatorzain is from every point of view exactly as legitimate as the other, which was itself only the survivor of divers Italian kinds. Yet again Milton's sonnets are interesting because they are almost the first instance of perception, on the part of an English poet, of the unmatched suitableness of the sonnet form for the purposes of "occasional" poetry. Before Milton the sonnet had been very generally written in sequences, and almost invariably devoted to the subject of love—a subject for which it is, though supremely, yet by no means exclusively, suited. Since his day, no doubt, it has received further extensions, especially the topographical (the discovery of which is the great glory of Bowles), and the descriptive-pictorial, where Rossetti reigns almost alone. But Milton's innovation, or rather extension, invited not only these but almost all others of whatsoever kind, as will be seen from their subjects—The Nightingale, His own Twenty-third Year, The Imminent Cavalier Attack on London, To a Virtuous Young Lady, To Lady Margaret Ley, three political-controversial (one of them a twenty-lined "tail" sonnet), To Lawes the Musician, On Mrs. Catharine Thomson, to Fairfax, Cromwell, and Vane, On the Massacre in Piedmont, On his Blindness, To his friends Lawrence and Skinner, and On his Deceased Second Wife. Thus we have love, meditation, ethical compliment, epicede, polemic, and, in the most miscellaneous sense, "occasional" verse, all exemplified in this little handful. Sonnets.

They are far from being of equal value, and the extreme badness of some may, though it never should, have caused the depreciation of others. The divorce and political sonnets, for instance, simply display ill-temper and pique, trying to masquerade as banter in doggerel verse. Yet even here Milton's irrepressible talent for melodious and majestic phrase will break out, as in the line—

Which after held the sun and moon in fee,

and almost everywhere else the good gifts predominate altogether, or very nearly so. Even the very early and comparatively commonplace "Nightingale"[1] is full of them. The stately cadence of the "Three-and-twentieth Year" hides, as is not always the case, the author's proneness to take himself very seriously indeed. "The Assault" is a pair to it; the personal sonnets to or on others suit themselves to the dominant of comment or praise, or whatever it may be, with marvellous art; and the two finest of all, the "Massacre" sonnet and the "Blindness," develop the form on the side of grandeur in a way which has never been excelled, and, even in the abundant and sometimes consummate sonnet-practice of the nineteenth century, very seldom equalled.

The longer poems.

With respect to the three great poems of his last fifteen years, it is noticeable as to their matter that we have from his own hand a long list of subjects for poems, of which the majority are taken from the sacred history and the rest from the early chronicles of Britain, both South and North; secondly, as to the form of *Samson Agonistes*, that all these subjects appear to have been originally intended as tragedies in the Senecan form. We may reasonably connect this scheme with that curious dislike of rhyme, and of modern poetical forms generally, which made the admirer of Shakespeare, and the author of the exquisite rhymed early poems, endeavour to reverse the course of the English genius both in respect of rhyme and in respect of dramatic arrangement. As for *Paradise Lost*, the subject, as we should expect, had already, independently of the Miracle plays, been treated dramatically, and the fact is proper to be taken notice of by those who busy themselves with the subject of Milton's alleged indebtedness to other writers. What is proper to be said here on that subject may here be said very briefly. Milton has borrowed from these supposed originals nothing that makes him Milton; and the things that he may perhaps have borrowed are unimportant. It was, however, certain beforehand that so vast a subject as the Fall of Man, particularly as it would present itself to one equally enamoured of theological disquisition and stocked with profane learning, could not possibly be handled within the compass of an antique drama or even a trilogy. We do not know with any precision when the existing poem was begun, but it can hardly have been before 1656; and we do practically know that it was finished in about seven years from that time, though perhaps fear of bringing himself prominently before the public, and certainly the interruptions to all business caused by the plague in 1665 and the fire in 1666, hindered the

[1] Interesting, as noted before, in connection with the Chaucerian or pseudo-Chaucerian *Cuckoo and Nightingale*.

publication. The continuation, or *Paradise Regained*, is said, though only on the authority of the person who derives credit from the truth of the story, to have been suggested by Ellwood, a Quaker, and, like many of the original Quakers, a person of some ability and originality. It is not known whether any reason besides the fellow-feeling of blindness made Milton select Samson from the large number of similar subjects which he had earlier thought of. But the community of situation is sufficient reason.

Their blank verse.

The exclusive use of blank verse in the epics, and the predominance of it in the play, come directly from the craze against rhyme just referred to, which is itself not original in Milton, but, as has been shown amply already, a common idol (in the Baconian sense) of the Renaissance, a fallacy derived from an, in the main reasonable, admiration of the ancients. Milton had too good an ear to attempt the miserable sapphics and hexameters of the generation before, but his very ear suggested to him that he could, merely by variety of cadence and arrangement, supply the want of rhyme itself, the objections to which, in narrative as well as in dramatic verse, were, as we can see from Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (written, if not published, before *Paradise Lost* appeared), very much in the air at the time. For his own particular purpose, there is no doubt that blank verse exceptionally well suited his serried argument. His spacious description, his fiery and energetic narrative, could not, like the meandering tapestry work of Spenser or the cloud-and-sky pageantry of Shelley, have endured a regular confinement, even in such comparatively roomy bounds as those of the Spenserian, much less in any smaller stanza. The couplet would have perpetually teased and cramped him. He needed and he achieved the large and infinitely varied freedom of the verse paragraph which only blank verse allows, and which he himself could punctuate and vary in cadence till it acquires almost the beauty and the proportion of the stanza itself. We cannot, therefore, regret that he made these experiments; but it is entirely illegitimate to conclude from them that rhyme is a superfluity in non-dramatic, as it certainly is in dramatic, verse. A man may paint supremely with one finger, but he will do best to use the five that nature has given him.

Considerable difference of structure is noticeable in the decasyllabic verse of the three poems, even independently of those general characteristics of Miltonic verse which had best be noticed together and presently. In *Paradise Lost* the tendency, which has been noticed in *Comus*, to indulge too much in the redundant syllable is, on the whole, corrected. But the practice of *enjambement*, or running on from one line to the other, is extended to the fullest dramatic license, and forms indeed the chief instrument (with the

variety of pause which is contingent upon it) in the architecture of the verse paragraph. In *Paradise Regained* redundancy makes its appearance again; and in *Samson Agonistes*—perhaps deliberately, the dramatic form inviting it, perhaps as a mere consequence of an unconscious tendency—it becomes very prominent indeed. There is a difference, too, in phrase. The stately yet seldom over-gorgeous or over-stiff Miltonic diction reaches its acme in *Paradise Lost;* and, if a little less sweet and graceful than in the early poems, is still more accomplished, still more "inevitable," still more suited to convince all good judges that it cannot be better done at the time, for the purpose, and in the context. In the best passages of *Paradise Regained* there is no falling-off in this respect; but elsewhere there is, and the absence of splendour and succulence in the diction, joined to the occasional relaxation of the verse, makes that danger of the prosaic, which waits so constantly on blank verse, sometimes seem too imminent here. The process continues further in *Samson*, where the great pathos and greater dignity of the action cannot hinder the blank verse parts from being at once too dry and too loose. But here the choruses come to the rescue with their despised auxiliary rhyme and their exceeding beauty, while even their unrhymed Pindaric sections, though perhaps confessing a relaxing grasp of the paragraph-symphony, serve to vary the effect.

The substance of the three needs no praise, little account, and only a hint that, though never below, it is sometimes either above or outside the most appropriate themes of verse. Light treatment is rarely called for, and is never successfully given. But the mere narrative is, in *Paradise Lost* at any rate, managed with extraordinary skill; the personal touches, in reference chiefly to the blindness, both here and in *Samson*, give pathos without impertinence; the shorter poetical jewels are innumerable; and even the longer passages, many, if not most, of which could stand almost as substantive poems, would make a most formidable list. In blank verse out of drama we have few things that can approach, and nothing that excels, the picture of Pandemonium and its inhabitants; the scene with Sin and Death; the journey through Chaos; the address to Light at the beginning of Book III.; Satan's vision of the Sin and his speech on Niphates; the description of Paradise; the discovery by Ithuriel and the subsequent debate; parts of the story of Raphael; the Temptation; the change of nature thereafter; and the riot of names in the description of the view from the topmost mount of Paradise. All these are in *Paradise Lost*, and the sequel adds, though fewer and farther between, the great confession of Satan, "'Tis true I am that spirit unfortunate"; the dream of Christ, and the morning scene after it, with its traces of Milton's

Their matter.

reading in romance; the second prospect from the mount; the views of Rome and Athens; the storm; and, above all, the final moment on the golden spire of the Temple. Yet perhaps it is not in passages that Milton's greatness appears so decidedly as in the great achievement and attainment of the general scheme of his poems on the one hand, and the marvellous perfection of the single line and phrase on the other.

The extreme importance of Milton in English poetry has been already referred to, but must be now somewhat more fully, though still briefly, dwelt upon. He represents—and almost exhausts—the fourth great influence in English prosody. We have already seen how Chaucer gathered together and put, with an immense contribution of his own, the results of the struggles of Middle English towards such a prosody, and how his example, followed blindly and with a tongue as stammering as the eyes were dim, lasted for more than a century till the changes of the language put it for the moment aside; how Spenser, partly returning to it, partly gathering up *de novo* the results of the experiments of his immediate forerunners and the general influences of the Renaissance, gave poetry a fresh start; and, lastly, how the dramatists, and especially Shakespeare, suppled and shook out the texture of the decasyllabic line, varied its cadence, stocked it (on the principles of equivalence or slur) with a great number of new foot-combinations, while the lyric and stanza poetry of the fifty years between the *Calendar* and Milton's "Three-and-twentieth year" sonnet almost exhausted the possibilities of less uniform verse.

Milton's place in English prosody.

At the time which we have reached, as we have seen already, and shall see still more, the stream of original poetic thought was slackening; even the lyric composition, though almost more exquisite than ever, was dwindling in range, height, and strength, and tending to an exquisite prettiness rather than to passion or splendour; and, above all, the extreme laxity of structure into which the drama had degenerated was either rendering verse (as in the drama itself) mere hobbling prose, or by reaction was creating the sharply separated couplet, a form admirable for the lower varieties of poetry, not so admirable for the higher.

Just at this time came Milton, a poet with an exquisite ear and extraordinary science of form, great learning in his own and other languages, and a predilection for the special form of non-dramatic blank verse which, managed as he manages it, at once counteracts the effect of the sharp snip-snap couplet and of the wandering, involved, labyrinthine stanza. He tightened up the metre without unduly constricting it; he refined the expression without making it jejune. And in particular his need of an extremely varied line to construct

his paragraphs and supply the want of rhyme-music, made him, without adopting the sheer abandonment of the late dramatic verse, resort to every artifice of metrical distribution to avoid monotony.

So intricate and constant is this artifice that some have even imagined the invention by him of a "new prosody" not reducible to ordinary laws, or have resorted to the supposition of extrametrical syllables. As to this last, the existence of an extrametrical syllable, except at the beginning, the end, and (much more doubtfully) the middle of a line, proves the incompetence of the poet. Extrametrical syllables are the "epicycles" of criticism. It is true that there are a very few lines in Milton where no more than nine syllables can be made out by any artifice; and we must here suppose, either that he has followed Virgil's example in leaving these lines designedly incomplete, or else that he has, with rather doubtful judgment, borrowed from some other metres the license of making the initial foot monosyllabic, with strong stress and pause to serve for the missing half. It is true also that, probably seduced by his affection for Italian (in which language the prevailing cadence is always trochaic rather than iambic), he has substituted the trochee rather more freely than altogether suits the genius of English. But, with these two provisos, every line of his can be scanned with perfect strictness as an iambic of five feet in which the following feet are admissible, strictly speaking, in *any* place—iambus, trochee, anapæst, dactyl, and tribrach—while a redundant syllable is allowed in the last. With such precision, and on the whole such judgment, did he apply these principles, that in a certain sense English prosody up to the present time has gone no farther. Very many new metrical *combinations* have, of course, been invented, and the eighteenth century for a long time discarded, or used very gingerly, his licenses of equivalence and pause. But he practically put English prosody on the footing which it has maintained ever since; and, except in the few and always unsuccessful cases where poets have deliberately set themselves to attempt a new prosody, every poet from Dryden to Mr. Swinburne can be accounted for on the system applicable to him. His pattern of blank verse, admirable as a variation, is not a complete substitute for couplet or stanza; his vocabulary, at least in his later poems, may be objected to as unnecessarily stiff and loaded. But his prosody in the strict sense is exhaustive. No one up to his time (though Shakespeare had practically included everything) had deliberately and formally systematised all things; no one since his time has added anything new in principle.

The position now for two centuries assigned to Milton was during his lifetime held by Abraham Cowley.[1] This poet, whose

[1] In Chalmers. More completely in Dr. Grosart's "Chertsey Worthies."

popularity, extraordinarily high and extraordinarily brief, was not quite so unreasonable as his loss of it, was a Londoner born ten years after Milton, in 1618. He went to Westminster, and thence to Cambridge. He certainly wrote verse, and good verse, very early, for some of it was published when he was fifteen; but whether his reading and emulation of Spenser really enabled him to produce some of these poems at ten years old must be left to the reader. He had but just taken his Master's degree in 1643 when Cambridge fell into the power of the Parliamentarians, and he was ejected, went to Oxford, where he stayed for two years, and then going with Henrietta Maria to Paris, became her secretary. After some ten years' stay abroad, in 1656, he returned to England, and was arrested, but received his liberty on condition of some indefinite compliances which are vaguely and differently related. He returned to France till the Restoration, and was then, like many other Royalists, disappointed in hopes which Charles II. was perhaps not too careful to satisfy, but which he certainly could not in all cases have satisfied if he would. Nor was it very long before a beneficial lease of the Queen's lands gave him competence, if not affluence. He retired, however, in some dudgeon to Chertsey, and died there—not finding the country quite the poet's paradise—in July 1667. Cowley.

Cowley's remarkable prose may be for the present put aside. In his verse he is not merely a most curious bridge of communication between the couplet poets, the "school of good-sense," and the metaphysicals, but almost more than Waller, and much more than Denham, the pair who usually go with him, a bridge between one whole period of poetry and another. He wrote in youth a play called *The Guardian*, which he did not then intend for the stage, but after the Restoration altered and had acted as *Cutter of Coleman Street*. But this requires no special notice. His purely poetical works, which are by no means so easily to be distinguished by mere chronological order as might be thought likely, fall pretty easily into three classes when judged from the point of view of form—namely, couplet verse, lyrics and stanza-poems of various kinds, and Pindarics.

Of the couplet verse the most important piece in size, as indeed it is of the whole, is the curious sacred epic of the *Davideis*, much of which was written at Cambridge, though it was continued (it never was completed) later. Four books exist; yet even this manageable length, assisted by Cowley's immense popularity, never made it generally read. There are unquestionably fine things in it—from the opening picture of Hell, earlier by much than that of Milton, through the sketch of the Priests' College, a favourite His couplets.

theme with the author, and worked out by him also in prose, to David's account of Saul and of Jonathan. And the passages of length are as a rule inferior to the single lines and couplets, which are sometimes wonderfully fine. But the miscarriage of the piece as a whole may be accounted for many times over. It is true, as Johnson urges, that the story, being merely begun, has no time to justify itself, that its amplification of familiar Scripture is felt as impertinent, and that the decorations exhibit the fatal fault of the "metaphysicals" almost in the worst degree. But there is more than this. The very accomplishment of the couplets now and then jars with the phraseology and imagery, as would not have been the case in stanza or blank verse; and, little story as the poet gives himself room to tell, he interferes with the interest even of what little there is by constant divagation. The book is a museum of poetic fragments tastelessly cemented together, not an organic whole.

In his other couplet pieces, from quite early things to the translations intercalated in the *Essays*, Cowley shows much better, or at any rate is much more accessible, as a pioneer in the path. The piece upon the "Happy Birth of the Duke of Gloucester" in 1640, though sometimes "enjambed," shows on the whole a great preference for, and a pretty complete command of, the authentic, balanced, self-contained couplet with the cracker of rhyme at the tail of it. We only want weight to give us Dryden, and polish to give us Pope: the form is there already.

In his stanza-poems and lyrics proper Cowley shows the retrospective side of his poetic Janus-head, though it is observable that even in *Constantia and Philetus*, one of the earliest of the *Juvenilia*, the concluding couplets of the sixain "snap" as they would not have done in Daniel or in Drayton. The lyrics are often quite Jonsonian, while sometimes they have a lightness which Ben rarely achieved, and which is chiefly proper to his "sons," of whom Cowley was born just too late to be one. The famous *Chronicle*, his best-known thing, is the very best of poetic froth; while the *Anacreontics* are often equal to Ben, and sometimes not very far below Milton. One is frequently inclined to give Cowley a really high place, when something—his shallowness or his frigid wit, or a certain "shadow before" of eighteenth-century prose—interferes, especially in his once-adored *Mistress*.

The lyrics.

Undoubtedly, however, Cowley's *Pindarics* are the most peculiar efforts of his talent, and those which, upon his own time, produced most of the effect of genius. They are little read now, and there can be no doubt that both their structure and the presumed necessity of imitating Pindar's style of obscure conceit encouraged the metaphysical manner very treacherously.

The *Pindarics*.

But they would be interesting to us even were they far worse than they are intrinsically, because to the historian of literature nothing can ever be uninteresting which has, for a long time, supplied an obvious literary demand on the part of readers and provided employment for great writers. To Cowley we owe—in that sense of obligation which always presupposes remembrance, that the debt would have been due to another if this man had not been in case to lend—the really magnificent odes of Dryden, Gray, and Collins pretty directly; indirectly that still greater one of Wordsworth which is almost his solitary claim to have reached the highest summits of poetry; and many great things of Shelley and Tennyson, not to mention lesser men. And the eager adoption of the form, which for more than half a century produced libraries full of unreadable Pindarics (the most interesting and nearly the most hopeless examples being those of no less a man than Swift), shows us what the time wanted, how it was sick of the regular stanza, how blank verse was still a little too bold for it, while it had not yet settled down, or resigned itself to the regular tick of the couplet-clock. But as a matter of fact the things themselves are not contemptible. "Life and Fame," "Life," the "Ode to Mr. Hobbes," and others are, or at least contain, very fine things; and the chief drawback of the whole is that descent to colloquial abbreviations ("I'm," etc.) which was due partly to the slow vulgarising of popular taste on such points which we shall have to record, partly to the still-prevailing dread of slur and trisyllabic equivalence. On the whole, no doubt, Rochester was right when he said ("profanely," as Dryden very properly adds) that "Cowley was not of God, and so he could not stand." But the special reason of his fall was that he never could make up his mind whether to stand with the old age or with the new, with the couplet or with the wilder verse, with mystical fantasy or clear common sense, with lawless splendour or jejune decency.

Denham.

One splendid passage—which, by the way, did not appear in the first edition of the poem, *Cooper's Hill*, that contains it—has preserved to Sir John Denham[1] a little of the very disproportionate reputation which he earned during his life, thanks chiefly to his younger contemporary Dryden's generous eulogy of it. He was born in Dublin, and of Irish parentage on his mother's side, in 1615; had at Oxford and Lincoln's Inn a reputation for idleness and extravagance, especially in gambling; obtained some fame in 1641 by *The Sophy*, and published *Cooper's Hill* soon afterwards; lived chiefly at Oxford during the war, and chiefly in France after it; was knighted at the Restoration, and received a

[1] In Chalmers.

valuable place, the surveyorship of the king's buildings; was unlucky in marriage, became disordered in mind, and died on 10th April 1668.

Few, except for studious curiosity, are ever likely again to read Denham through, or even any considerable part of his not extensive work. *The Sophy* is a feeble tragedy; *Cooper's Hill*, putting aside the patch

Oh! could I flow like thee

and a few other fine lines, is chiefly a creditable, and tolerably though not very early, exercise in the new kind of couplet. A verse paraphrase of the Second Aeneid adopts the older and looser "enjambed" form of the same measure; indeed, this enjambment is common in Denham, and is found in *Cooper's Hill* itself. *Prudence*, *Justice*, *Old Age* (of all odd things a verse handling of the *De Senectute*), *The Progress of Learning*, are preludes to the eighteenth-century concert of couplet tunes on things not tunable. The smaller poems, with occasional flashes, such as the happy transformation (for translation it is not) of Martial's *Non ego sum Curius nec Numa nec Tatius* into

I pretend not to the wise ones
To the grave or the precise ones,

and a few pieces of some nobility like the elegy on Cowley and the attack on Love in favour of Friendship, are apt to oscillate between the tastelessly fantastical and the merely gross. Moreover, Denham is an eminent sinner in the small matters of grammar, rhyme, and measure which disgrace so many writers in the middle and later part of the seventeenth century, and are obviously due not to any imperfect condition of the language, but to sheer carelessness and a down-at-heel fashion of literature. He has occupied the place between Cowley and Waller as the "three reformers of our numbers" so long, that he has established a title to it by prescription, and as it has long been understood what this "reform of numbers" meant, there is the less reason for turning him out. But he is much less of a poet than Cowley, while it is an injustice to couple his slatternly muse with the neat and graceful, if not radiantly lovely or bewitching, muse of Edmund Waller.[1]

Waller.

This curious person, whose actual poetical achievements were helped by accidents of all kinds, including social position, wealth, long life, and the fact that the greatest English writer of his latest days was a man of singular modesty and generosity towards his contemporaries, was born in Hertfordshire, but of a family connected by property with the neighbouring county of Bucks,

[1] In Chalmers, and recently in "The Muses' Library."

and by extraction with Kent, on 3rd March 1605. He succeeded as a mere child to a very large fortune, was educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, and early introduced to court.

This was an age of precocity, but Waller's was certainly very remarkable, if he was not eighteen when he wrote his poem on Prince Charles's escape from shipwreck at Santander; for there is no doubt that the cast of the couplets in which it is written is unlike anything before except mere scraps and fragments, and almost exactly like what was to prevail for an entire century, and, with Pope's refinements, for nearly two. When we remember that the alleged time of his writing such couplets as

> With the sweet sound of this harmonious lay
> About the keel delighted dolphins play

was the year of the publication of the first folio of Shakespeare, that it was seven years only after his death, and seven more before the birth of Dryden, that Milton was a boy at school, that Drayton, Jonson, Chapman were alive and to be so for many years more, that Fletcher was not dead and Cowley a child of five years old, the thing is certainly surprising enough to have caused doubts.

Waller was to live sixty-four years longer, nor was his life uneventful. He increased his wealth by marrying a city heiress, who died very soon; and is said only in his widower state to have begun to court Lady Dorothy Sidney—"Sacharissa"—who would not have him. "Amoret" is said by a less confident tradition to have been Lady Sophia Murray. He actually married a lady of less distinguished position, by whom he had many children. His fortune naturally opened Parliament to him, but his political career was not fortunate or creditable. In the Short Parliament he was an active member of the Opposition. In the Long, though he was a relation of Hampden, he became somewhat less antagonistic to the court, and though he continued to sit after the final breach, was in a manner *persona grata* to Charles, with whom he was sent to negotiate. Had what is known as Waller's Plot—for the details of which we must refer to history—succeeded, or had he shown more fortitude at its failure, Waller's name might have been at least as favourably known in historical as in poetical records. Unluckily, on the plot's discovery and his own arrest, he confessed everything with precipitation, informed against others, urged them to do the like, was at least part cause of the execution of his own brother-in-law Tomkyns, and himself escaped with life, exile, a fine of ten thousand pounds, and a hopelessly damaged reputation, which was not much mended by his making his peace with Cromwell, his kinsman and the subject of one of his best poems. As he had wit and wealth he was welcome at

Whitehall after the Restoration, sat in several Parliaments, and only missed the Provostship of Eton (for which he asked) because he was ineligible as a layman. He survived Charles II., is said to have given his infatuated successor good advice, and died in 1687.

Waller, as his own age would have said, wrote poetry like a gentleman; that is to say, he neither published often nor attempted anything of great magnitude. But his very early beginnings and his very long life enabled him to put together a considerable poetical baggage. We have noticed his first couplet poem; it was followed by others, of which the chief are that on the Duke of Buckingham's death, which is quite in Dryden's earlier manner forty years later; a batch of complimentary poems to persons of the court of Charles I. from the Queen downward; another, written at Penshurst and full of the "Sacharissa" affair; the *Battle of the Summer Islands* (Waller's longest poem except the later *Divine Love*, and like it remarkable for the extreme shortness of the cantos, which contain only a few score lines each); and the *Instructions to a Painter*, on the fighting at sea in 1665. The panegyric on the Protector is in the quatrain, being written at the time when *Gondibert* (*vide infra*) had made that form fashionable, but the quatrains are merely pairs of couplets, and are not the equal of Dryden's somewhat later "heroic stanzas" on Cromwell's death, still less of *Annus Mirabilis*.

Of the smaller lyrics, which, like his "reform of our numbers" made Waller's reputation with his own time, one, "Go Lovely Rose," is universally known, and with the almost equally popular "On a Girdle" forms an almost sufficient sample for judgment. As was said above, Waller's muse always presents herself in irreproachable condition, not a curl out of place, not a spot or crease on her dress, the colours chosen with sufficient taste, the arrangement made with sufficient skill. Only, some critics think her features insignificant and her expression quite devoid of air and fire. Once or twice, indeed, the spirit of lyric verse and of intense though fantastic poetry which was still abroad does descend on Waller, as in the famous comparison between Sacharissa and Amoret ("Sacharissa's beauty's wine," etc.), and better still in the really magnificent image (proving the truth of its own sentiment, for it seems to occur in his last work)—

> The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that time hath made.

Not often was Waller so happily metaphysical.

As something general was said of Milton's influence on the course of poetry, so we must also consider briefly the influence of these his contemporaries in a direction different indeed from his, but so far to be connected with it that they too were innovating,

and were innovating in directions to be followed afar and freely by their poetical successors.

A good deal has been written on the exact origin of this change in poetry from varied and rather loose measures to the tight, neat, heroic couplet—French influence being the point most hotly contested. It is undeniable that the court of Henry IV. did exercise certain influences on that of James I., and that in the former, under Malherbe and Balzac respectively, the tide was turning from ornate and fantastic standards of verse and prose to more correct and more frigid models. But the phenomenon is much more one of coincidence than of imitation, though it is impossible to deny that the change had begun and been very conspicuous in France long before the earliest experiments of Waller. That poet, according to his own account, found his chief predecessor in Fairfax (see p. 357, *ante*); more recently an ancestor has been found for him in George Sandys,[1] his senior at least. To insist, however, too curiously or too peremptorily on either connection would be only to vary the mistake in regard to French influence. In most cases literary changes are not initiated by any one person, or even by any one country. They are in the air, the wind scatters the seeds of them, and they spring up more or less simultaneously, and even with a certain appearance of spontaneity. Only later, when some very commanding genius gives them a home, as here in the case of Dryden, does deliberate imitation play a large part in their diffusion.

The "reform of our numbers."

Generally, the preference for and practice of the couplet may be said to be only one more instance of the eternal "see-saw," of that alternation between the plain and the ornate, between the vast and vague and the cabined and correct, which pervades the whole history of literature in verse and in prose alike. In particular, the couplet accommodated itself better to the special poetical desires of the age, and still more to those which were coming in its successor. The time was ceasing (without complete knowledge that it ceased) to care for passionate and romantic narrative. Its love-poetry, though still retaining an exquisite sweetness, was sinking towards gallantry and badinage. Its leaning in didactic verse was shifting from the metaphysical and theological to the scientific and merely ethical. It was acquiring a strong craving for satire—political and other. Above all, it was becoming gradually less dreamy and more business-like, while its critical tendencies in the lower sense were also being

[1] Sandys (1577-1643), a traveller and a translator, who wrote good prose as well as verse, published, rather late, translations of *Ovid* (1632), paraphrases of the Scriptures (1636 and later), a tragedy, *Christ's Passion*, etc. (ed. Hooper, 2 vols. London, 1872). Sandys uses various metres, but has a distinct and early command of the couplet. For Sir John Beaumont, *v. sup.* p. 355.

awakened. For all these purposes the stanza, the sonnet, and the other forms dearest to the Elizabethans and Jacobeans proper were extremely ill suited. They all demanded oratorical point, clean hitting, and mathematical arrangement, for which the couplet was as well suited as the others were unapt. And though, even after nearly a century, it is difficult to get our ears to accept the fact, there is no doubt that to those surfeited with other sounds the sharp rattle, the regular tick, as it may be called, of this couplet was a grateful and agreeable change. We still have to make a positive effort to understand what four or five generations meant by saying that Waller had invented and Dryden perfected "harmony" and "smoothness of numbers." Mere study will indeed show us that the couplet had already acquired over these generations such a mastery that when they talked thus they were really thinking of the couplet itself only; and no doubt the couplets of Waller, still more of Dryden, are vastly smoother and more harmonious than those of Drayton or Daniel. As for other metres, one reason why the eighteenth century was unjust is simply that it was ignorant. Except a few antiquarian students like Oldys in the first half and Warton in the second, very few men indeed in all probability had ever opened *Christ's Victory* or *Philarete*, the songs of Campion or the sonnets of his contemporaries. Good wits who read Spenser *did* like him; though it is clear, even from their imitations, that they had lost the key to his true music, that it was in more senses than one out of time to them. Great harm has been done in literary history, and much labour wasted, by refusing to accept facts of this kind, and persevering in a fruitless and too often misleading attempt to get behind them, to account for them. Simple acceptance, not from pusillanimity or laziness, but in a wise passiveness, is the best attitude, and nowhere more so than here.

CHAPTER II

THE METAPHYSICALS—THE LYRIC POETS—THE MISCELLANISTS, ETC.

Meaning of the term "metaphysical"—Crashaw—George Herbert—Vaughan—Herrick—Carew—Randolph—Habington—Cartwright—Corbet—Suckling—Lovelace—Cleveland and others—Marvell—Bishop King—Sherburne, Godolphin, Stanley, Cotton, Brome—Quarles, More, Beaumont—Davenant—Chamberlayne—Miscellanies.

It may seem unreasonable to have noticed the two most famous and characteristic of the school of poets whom Johnson dubbed metaphysical—namely, Donne and Cowley—before devoting any special explanation to that word and to the thing which it was intended to denote; but there are good reasons for the postponement. In the first place, Donne is anterior by nearly a whole generation to those who are usually classed with him; he was some forty years older than Cowley, and it is probable that he wrote next to none of his characteristic work after Cowley was born. The lumping of the two together, and of both with others, has led to the most grotesque blunders, such as that which Wordsworth makes in representing Donne's style as a decadence and reaction from that of men who were actually younger than himself. In the second place, Cowley, though undoubtedly one of the chiefs of the school that Johnson meant to portray, is, as has been seen, but half a metaphysical, and has a common-sense face as well as a fantastic one.

The term "metaphysical," which Johnson took from a phrase of Dryden's on Donne, must be exactly understood. We must not understand "metaphysical" here in its strict philosophical sense, nor in that of Shakespeare's "metaphysical aid" (that is to say, "supernatural"), nor, of course, in that accidental one which is said to have originated the actual word. But it is not inappropriately used for the habit, common to this school of poets, of always seeking to express something after, something behind, the simple, obvious first sense and suggestion of a subject.

Meaning of the term "metaphysical."

Johnson has indeed not made so much of his term as he might; for he himself only attributes to his "metaphysicals," as their differentia, learning, with a kind of misplaced wit, and the desire to say something that had never been said before. The metaphysical Caroline school had all these things, but these things were not peculiar to them. The Euphuists, in fact, had had them all. But until themselves the quest after the remote, the search for the after-sense, for contingent and secondary suggestion, had been less marked. The Elizabethan "conceit" is very near it; you may find the metaphysical spirit (as indeed what may you not?) in Shakespeare. But between 1630 and 1660, with a certain belated set of appearances later still, this metaphysical tendency employed almost all poetry except that of Milton, whose intensity melted and transformed this as other peculiarities. Butler is a metaphysical humorist, Chamberlayne a metaphysical romance-writer, Herbert and Vaughan metaphysicals in spiritual poetry, Herrick and Carew, with all their minor train, metaphysical amorists of the decorative kind. Crashaw is perhaps the chief metaphysical, the type of the whole class; Cleveland, Flatman, Wild, and others belated and feeble laggards in the style. And this style is so much interwoven with the practice of the set of poets often called Cavalier Lyrists that it is difficult to disentangle the two. All, no doubt, owed much to that mighty influence of Donne, which was so strangely disconnected from any publication of his work. But Donne himself is metaphysical in the greater and wider sense. His thoughts, even his conceits, are never far-fetched, because his immense and brooding imagination reaches to them all without the trouble of fetching. The others have to fetch them; they could in some cases hardly go farther, they could in many hardly fare worse.

Let us therefore, for the sake of order and classification, make divisions in the abundant group of poets we have before us. Let us take the three great sacred metaphysicals, Crashaw, Herbert, Vaughan, first; then pass to the lyric group, Herrick, Carew, Habington, Lovelace, Suckling, and others; next notice three, oddly contrasted, of the Commonwealth time, Davenant, Chamberlayne, and Marvell; and lastly give some account of the innumerable and curious collections of songs, ballads, and the like which succeed the Elizabethan miscellanies, and serve with less breach than in any other department of verse as a connecting chain between the poetry of the sixteenth century and the verse of the eighteenth.

Richard Crashaw,[1] who, if he could but have kept himself at his own best, would have been one of the greatest of English poets, was

[1] See Chalmers. Ed. Grosart, 2 vols. 1872, and A. R. Waller, Cambridge, 1904.

born in London either in 1616 or, as has been made more probable, in 1612. He was the son of a clergyman, whose extremely Puritan leanings may, as often happens, account for Crashaw's subsequent inclination in the opposite direction. Richard was educated at Charterhouse and Cambridge, where his college, Peterhouse, was as much the centre of High Church teaching and feeling as Emmanuel was of Puritanism. He refused the Covenant in 1644, was deprived of his Fellowship, and went abroad, quickly joining the Church of Rome. He died at Loretto, where he had been appointed canon, in 1650, and there were rumours that he was poisoned. Some of his poems were published during his lifetime, others in a posthumous edition, and a certain amount of matter certainly, probably, or possibly his has been added since from MS. But his best work in English (he was a pretty Latin poet, and is said to have been the author of a well-known conceit on the miracle of Cana, while he certainly wrote an elegant fancy on the "Bubble") has been known for two centuries and a half.

Crashaw.

Crashaw's poetry, more almost than any other in English, must underlie different and nearly irreconcilable judgments, according as the judge insists upon measure, order, and the steady working out of central ideas in poetry, or prefers casual and irregular bursts of expression and fancy. Pope, who rather liked him, expressed a typical judgment from the first point of view, the terms of which undoubtedly suggested Johnson's criticism of the whole metaphysical school. To the great apostle of correctness, "all that regards design, form, fable, which is the soul of poetry, all that concerns exactness or consent of parts, which is the body," seemed wanting in Crashaw; only "pretty conceptions, fine metaphors, glittering expressions, and something of a neat cast of verse—which are properly the dress, gems, or loose ornaments of poetry"—are to be found in him and in his likes, who should be considered as versifiers and witty men rather than as poets. We may formulate a judgment from the extreme opposite point in very similar words; for those who take it would doubtless say that in passionate conception (which is the soul of poetry) and harmonious metrical expression (which is its body) Crashaw is at his best very nearly supreme, while he need only be found wanting in bulk and arrangement of plan, orderly management of means, and self-criticism, which, though useful adjuncts to poetry, are common to it with all literature, and do not usually affect its special excellence. The right way, as usual, will be between these two extremes, but very much nearer to the standpoint of our anonymous enthusiast than to that of Pope. By far the greater part of Crashaw's work is devoted to sacred subjects, but some of his best and prettiest, if not his most sublime, pieces are secular. The best

of these is the well-known *Wishes to his Supposed Mistress*, a decidedly whimsical but infinitely graceful thing; and a version from the Italian beginning—

> To thy lover,
> Dear, discover.

But it must by no means be inferred that Crashaw was only master of this exquisite trifling, and of the frail skipping measures that best suit it. He was at least an equal adept in Pindarics, and in the stateliest form of the contemporary couplet; and his noblest poems are composed in measures of this kind. They are also entirely devoted to religious subjects. Not indeed that this class of subject was, by or in itself, at all a guarantee of unmixed excellence in Crashaw. His very worst things—things as bad as can be found in the wide and various range of metaphysical absurdity—occur in the poem *The Weeper*, on St. Mary Magdalen, which unluckily stands in the forefront of his works. The eyes of the penitent are "sister springs, Parents of silver-forded rills"; they are "thawing crystal heavens of ever-falling stars"; their tears being "the cream of the milky way," cherubs sip of them, and their liquid is bottled by angels for new guests of heaven. Further, the eyes are the hour-glasses of time; "walking baths, compendious oceans"; "fertile mothers of simpering sons." Common sense may almost be excused if it is indignant and disgusted at these frigid ardours, these fustian imitations of brocade. Yet if we turn from this to *The Flaming Heart*, a poem in honour of St. Theresa, and to a hymn addressed to the same Saint, we shall find, though still the same pomp and prodigality of imagery, nothing frigid, nothing fustian, but an ever growing and glowing splendour of sentiment and diction, which culminates, in the first named of the two pieces, in the most unerring explosion of passionate feeling to be found in English, perhaps in all poetry. Crashaw often translated, sometimes from very second-rate models like Marino and Strada. He can be made, though by something of a garble, the awful example of the style. But he as certainly displays its most splendid capabilities.

An infinitely more popular poet than Crashaw, and certainly a more equable, though at the best of both Crashaw towers over him, was George Herbert,[1] a member of the noble Norman-Welsh family of that name, and brother of Lord Herbert of Cherbury.

George Herbert.

He was born at Montgomery Castle on 13th April 1593, went to Cambridge, became Fellow of Trinity in 1615, and Public Orator four years later, at the early age of twenty-six. He held the place for eight years with great distinction, though

[1] Many editions. The "Aldine" was revised by Dr. Grosart (London, 1890).

he was charged with the fault of haughtiness, and seems to have looked forward to a political career. But something led him to the course of saintly life as a country clergyman, latterly at Bemerton, near Salisbury, which he pursued for six years, till his early death in 1632. His verse (almost entirely included in the well-known collection called *The Temple*, which made Crashaw call his *Steps to the Temple*) was not published till after his death, but very soon after, for though the date of the first edition is 1633, there are undated copies which seem to have been distributed in the previous year. *The Temple* consists of 160 pieces, arranged partly with a fancy of reference to the structural arrangement of a church, beginning with "The Porch"; partly under the heads of the great festivals and services; often under quite fantastic titles, "The Quip," "The Pulley," and so forth. There is no prevailing metre—couplets, stanzas, and regular and irregular lyrical forms being chosen as may best suit the poet's purpose, while occasionally he will even condescend, as in "Easter Wings," to that device of adjusting his verse lengths to artificial patterns which excited almost more horror than ridicule in the eighteenth century.

And the note of fantasy is at least as much present in idea and in diction, though Herbert seldom pushes either to very extravagant lengths. In the "Church Porch," which is a string of ethical and religious maxims, this fantasy does not often pass beyond the almost proverbial imagery to which we are accustomed in such connections. But in the more abstract and doctrinal poems Herbert gives himself a much wider range, and ransacks art and nature for quaint similes, sometimes worked out in the fashion of the emblem-poetry then so popular. The Game of Bowls; the real or fancied properties of the orange tree; the Palace of the World, with Wisdom sweeping away its cobwebs, Pleasure adorning it with balconies, Sin splitting the walls with stealthy fig-tree growth, Grace shoring them, and Death throwing them down; the imaginary peculiarities of the crocodile and elephant —Herbert presses all these and a myriad more into his service. Yet the unaffected piety, and perhaps still more the perfect charity, of his tone, his abstinence from anything like strife and crying, the heavenly peace that pervades him, have made his work tolerated by many who are not as a rule very tolerant of conceits.

As a poet he is certainly not the equal of either Crashaw or Vaughan, and in his own quiet fashion he has in the present century been equalled by Keble and surpassed by Miss Christina Rossetti. He very seldom transports: the throb of response to the highest and happiest thoughts and expressions of the poets is very uncommon in reading him; his is an equable merit, a soothing and healthful pleasure, rather than the dazzling excellence, the contagious rapture of the great ones. But he can never be mentioned with contempt

by any one who loves poetry, and he undoubtedly holds a high place among those who have attempted the exceedingly difficult task of sacred verse. If his successes are never so great as those of some others, it is hardly too much to say that he never fails with the maddening failure too common in religious poets, and this is in itself a great thing.

The contrast between Crashaw and Herbert is repeated in that between Herbert and Vaughan,[1] but with certain variations. Henry Vaughan—"Silurist," as he called himself, from the seat of his family in South Wales, "Swan of Usk," *Olor Iscanus*, from the river on whose banks he lived—was born in or about 1622, at a place called Newton St. Bridget. He and his twin brother Thomas (a poet likewise and a diligent writer on occult and "Hermetic" subjects) went to Jesus College, Oxford. He seems to have begun the study of law in London, but to have turned to that of medicine. He may have actually served in the Royalist forces during the Rebellion, and was certainly a strong partisan of the King's cause. He retired quietly to Brecon during the usurpation and there practised physic. Hardly anything is known of his long life. He may have had two wives; he certainly had one, who survived him at his death, on St. George's Day, 1695. He was the last of the Caroline school proper.

Vaughan.

His poetry as originally published is contained in four volumes—*Poems*, chiefly secular, in 1646; *Silex Scintillans*, his principal book, and wholly sacred, in 1650-51; *Olor Iscanus*, also sacred, a year later; and *Thalia Rediviva*, many years afterwards, in 1678, which returns to the secular. There is no doubt (we have his word for it, and without his word there could not be any) that Vaughan was greatly influenced in all the more remarkable part of his work by Herbert, whose poems were published twenty years before *Silex Scintillans*. The relation between the two men is altogether that of master and pupil, but in divers ways. Often Vaughan copies Herbert directly. But the spirit of the two was different and resulted differently. Vaughan is not more or less pious than Herbert, but his piety is much more mystical; his thoughts are deeper and farther brought. And his expression is much less equable. He is seldom fantastic to frigidity, but he is often meditative to dulness. He never disgusts, but he sometimes tires, because he has not cared, or has not been able, to give his thought clear poetic expression.

[1] The *Poems* of Vaughan, after being completely accessible only in one of Dr. Grosart's privately printed editions, have been at last edited by Mr. E. K. Chambers in two volumes of the "Muses' Library" (London, 1896). The *Sacred Poems* were provided long since in the Aldine series (ed. Lyte, often reprinted), and there is an edition of the *Secular Poems* by J. R. Tutin (Hull, 1893).

There was no real reason on the moral side for the compunction which Vaughan, late in life, expressed for his early secular poems. But as a profane poet he has nothing above the average of dozens of half or wholly forgotten versifiers of his time, and is often below that average. His love-poems to Amoret and Etesia are sometimes pretty, though never distinguished; and in octosyllables, where he chiefly follows the manner of Jonson, he is at about his happiest. His decasyllabic couplets are, as Mr. Chambers has justly observed, based on Donne, and on the worst part of Donne, the designedly crabbed form of the Satires and some of the Epistles. It is as the author of the *Silex Scintillans* that Vaughan holds his place. And the title itself, which is explained by the frontispiece—a heart of flint burning and bleeding under the stroke of a thunderbolt from a cloud—is appropriate in more than the pious sense. At times there is in Vaughan genuine blood and fire; but it is by no means always, or even very often, that the flint is kindled and melted to achieved expression. His most famous and successful things, "They are all gone into a world of light"; "The World," with its magnificent opening—

> I saw Eternity the other night
> Like a great ring of pure and endless light
> All calm as it was bright;

"The Retreat," with its suggestion of Wordsworth's great ode; "The Storm," with its intensely realised imagery; the quaint and pleasant piece beginning, "I walked the other day to spend my hour"; the beautiful "Joy"; "The Garland," with its wonderfully striking picture of youthful delusions, and the sharp turn, "I met with a dead man, Who thus to me began"; "The Waterfall," with its Miltonic richness and appropriateness of epithet, and a marvellous adaptation of sound to sense—these and some other things are not merely in company unworthy of them as far as the achieved expression goes, but are even for the most part unworthy of themselves. But this inequality of expression is redeemed by the almost constant presence of a rare and precious tone of thought. The great age of the Church of England finds in Vaughan, at his best, its best poetical exponent. He stops short of the almost maudlin intoxication with divinity which carried Crashaw out of the Church altogether, and he far transcends the decent piety of Herbert.

The pair chosen to follow this trio is in general character strangely contrasted with it, though a certain bridge of transition exists in Herrick's "Divine" poems. Both Herrick and Carew are far greater *artists* than any of the three just mentioned. But despite of this and of the fact that their temper is far more mundane, they are still alike.

Herrick.

Robert Herrick, who belonged to a good Leicestershire stock, rather remarkably connected with literature through Quarles, Dryden, and Swift as well as through himself, was born in London in 1591. His father, Nicholas Herrick, a goldsmith, died very shortly afterwards by falling out of window. Robert was left subject to the guardianship of his uncle, a rich member of his father's trade, and by an accident, rare with men of letters of the time, we have some letters exchanged between ward and guardian, when the former was at Cambridge. Here he was a member, first of St. John's College, then of Trinity Hall, and it is thought that he had gone to the first-named from Westminster School. But despite these letters we still do not know much of him. He took his M.A. in 1620, when he was nearly thirty years old, and apparently orders in 1629, when he was not far from forty—an entrance into the Church nearly as late as Donne's, and even less accounted for. At any rate, in the year mentioned, he was presented to the living of Dean Prior on the skirts of Dartmoor, at which he rails much, and which he occupied till the triumph of the Parliament drove him out. His two books of verse, *Noble Numbers* (1647) and *Hesperides* (1648), are differently dated but appeared together. There is absolutely no mention of him from this time till 1662, when he was restored to Dean Prior; and again there is none till his death and burial in October 1674, at the age of more than eighty. Moreover, though gossip about men of letters was just beginning, there is a strange silence about Herrick. The two great chatterers of the time, Howell and Aubrey, never mention him, though the former at least must have been sometimes, probably often, in his company, as both were "sons" of Ben. The *Session of the Poets* and other literary comments of his day pass him by; his work, contrary to the almost universal habit of the time, had no commendatory verses prefixed to it, and it seems to have remained almost unnoticed till the end of the last century.[1]

Since its recovery, however, there have been natural diversities of opinion, justified to some extent by the admixture of bad and good which it contains. The two divisions together contain rather more than fourteen hundred poems, to which a few doubtful pieces from miscellanies or MSS. have to be added. No one extends to more than a few pages, and most do not exceed a few lines. They fall naturally into three classes: epigrams imitating Jonson, offensively personal in tone and coarse in diction, with but seldom a grain of

[1] He has been compensated since by repeated reprints, among the latest being those by Mr. Pollard (2 vols. London, 1891) and by the present writer (2 vols. London, 1893), while valuable work has been recently (1912) done on him by Professor Moorman in England and by M. Floris-Delattre in France.

real wit to keep them tolerably sweet; Divine Poems of wonderful beauty at their best, which best is expressed by the "Litany to the Holy Spirit" and "The White Island"; and lastly, an immense residue of secular poems, amatory, descriptive, occasional in the widest possible sense.

It is on these last that the fame of Herrick really rests, and it is securely based. The Julia of the universally known "Night-Piece"—"And when I meet, Thy silvery feet, My soul I'll pour into thee"—is only one of a group of perhaps real, perhaps imaginary mistresses—Althea, Electra, Perilla, Dianeme, and others—to whom the most exquisitely phrased love-poems are devoted; the country sports and scenes (though he despised them), such as the "hock-cart," the maying, and the like, find the same celebration; his maid Prudence, his bread-bin, the daffodils, violets, primroses, cherry-blossoms, the very grass itself, find in him a singer, and he can be more ambitious and abstracted, as in the "Mad Maid's Song" and other things. But the subject of Herrick's verse never matters very much: it is the exquisite quality of his phrase and his "numbers" that exalts him to a place all his own. This quality beggars definition, and is perhaps the greatest justification in English literature of the "theory of the single word"—that one special word is the right thing in the right literary place, and that if you do not get it "all's spent, nought's had." No one has ever been quite certain what the word "Protestant" means in the celebrated verse beginning, "Bid me to live and I will live, Thy *Protestant* to be"; yet every one who knows poetry feels that "Protestant" could not be changed for any other word without loss; and this is only an extreme and obvious case. In all his famous things, which a hundred anthologies have made known, and in others less divulged, this absolute and unerring perfection of word-selection appears. The thoughts are sometimes trivial, sometimes not; but the expression gives them at once the freshness of the morning dew and the perennial character of marble. Herrick's images are not as a rule out of the way; his mere vocabulary is, for his time and class, quite ordinary for the most part. But the choice and the collocation make it something absolutely unique.

The art of Thomas Carew,[1] narrower in range, much more sparingly exemplified, and more artificial in appearance, is of much the same kind. Many details of his life are problematical, but he was certainly of a Gloucestershire or Worcestershire branch of the great western family of Carew or Carey, was perhaps born in Kent, perhaps went to Westminster School, and perhaps

Carew.

[1] Ed. Ebsworth, London, 1893. Like most of the poets in this chapter, Herrick and Vaughan being the main exceptions, Carew is in the great collections of Anderson and Chalmers.

thence to Corpus Christi College, Oxford. The University though not the College is certain, as also that he was known to most of the wits, especially the Oxford set of Falkland and Hyde, that he was Sewer (marshal of the dishes) to Charles I., that he was a "son" of Ben's. He died in or about 1638. Most other things about him are guesswork, but it is the merest uncritical partisanship to neglect or slight the testimony of his admiring friend Clarendon, that his life had been somewhat licentious, though his death was the death of the penitent. A masque of his, *Coelum Britannicum*, which is not unworthy to be ranked with Ben's all but best, had been published in 1634 but Carew's *Poems* appeared posthumously in 1640, and they did not include divers paraphrases of Psalms which are of no great value—a sentence which extends to divers attributed poems, fished out from MSS. or other sources by recent diligence. The volume of 1640, small as it is, still contains his titles to fame.

This volume is small, and the contemporary malevolence or jest which attributed "hide-boundness" to Carew's muse was not subject to any such complete contradiction as Johnson's characterisation of Fielding as a "barren rascal." But the titles are indisputable. The best—the "Persuasions to Love," to A. L.—with its at first playful octosyllables rising to a panting throb of passion seldom equalled; the song, characteristic of Caroline triumph in such things, "Give me love or more disdain"; the still more splendid "To my Inconstant Mistress"—"When thou, poor excommunicate"; the indignant and manly expostulation, "I was foretold, your rebel sex"; the inferior but very pretty "He that loves a rosy cheek"; the second "To Celia Singing"; "Red and White Roses," with two or three other things the pattern-piece of the author; the audacious but also admirable "Rapture"; the beautiful group of epitaphs on Lady Mary Villers; the stately elegy on Donne, so generous and yet so just; and, to finish with what all admit, the splendid "Ask me no more"—these things by no means exhaust, but put at perhaps their very best, Carew's titles to high honour as an English poet. His consummate elegance has no doubt done him harm with some judges, according to the prejudice put in the well-known verses of his "father" Ben—

> Still to be neat, still to be drest,

and so forth. But the "Rapture," the Donne Elegy, and the "A. L." verses are there to give evidence of intensity, of real passion on his part, which at once negatives the suspicion. And if we meditate a little on such a piece as "Red and White Roses," it will be very hard to refuse its author a place, apart it may be from the greater

summits of poetry and lower than they are, but untouched, unapproached by any peak in its own kind. Here, as in those best pieces of Herrick which have been noticed above, there is an absolute and final felicity in the style.

The poets of this Caroline age are so numerous, they are so attractive, and their attractions consist so much in little separate bits and strokes, that there is danger, more than in almost any other of our compartments, of being seduced into prolixity disproportionate for such a survey as this; and we must quicken the pace with a large group of singers. The order in which they are mentioned, though a certain rough chronological arrangement may be observed, is not very material. The lyric touch, which is the strong point of nearly all, distinguishes, with only slight changes, alike men who died before Milton left for Italy, such as Randolph, and men who saw the eighteenth century, such as Sedley.

Randolph.

Thomas Randolph,[1] who will be mentioned again for his plays, was born in 1605, of a gentle family. He went to Westminster School and was of both Universities, belonging more originally to Cambridge, where he was a Fellow of Trinity. He died when he was only thirty. He is accused of rather free living, but this sort of vague and stock censure of poets goes for little, and certain elegiac verses by his brother Robert, a student of Christ Church, who outlived him many years, have a more genuine ring in their eulogy than is usual in such things. Randolph's non-dramatic verse, though not very copious, is fresh, vigorous, and distinctly original. It is, especially in the couplet pieces, of the older cast of his time, and in stanza or octosyllable, rather Jacobean than Caroline. His best piece, perhaps, is the "Ode to Master Anthony Stafford to hasten him into the country," a thing somewhat in Ben's style.

Habington.

William Habington[2] was born in the same year with Randolph, at Hindlip Hall, Worcestershire. He was a Roman Catholic, and so did not go to either University, but lived as a country gentleman, marrying Lady Lucy Herbert, and dying in 1654. He left one play, *The Queen of Arragon*, and a collection of poems, the bulk of which celebrates the charms and virtues of his wife under the title-name of *Castara*. Friendship as well as love inspired him, and he wrote many verses on the death of his comrade, George Talbot, with a few miscellanies. Habington is creditably distinguished from too many of his contemporaries by a very strict and remarkable decency of thought and language, and he has some very fine passages. On the whole, however, he ranks rather with Herbert

[1] Ed. W. C. Hazlitt, 2 vols. London, 1875.

[2] Ed. Arber, and in the collection of Chalmers.

as a poet of few faults—he has not even the excess of Herbert's quaintness—than with Crashaw as one of magnificent bursts, or with Herrick as one of constantly exquisite felicities.

William Cartwright[1] was born about five years after Randolph, in 1610, and died two years before Habington, in 1643, but the date and place of his birth are disputed. He certainly spent more than half of his short life at Oxford, where he died during the war, and five years after he had taken orders. He left plays, too, and poems, the latter fairly numerous, but mostly short and always occasional. His couplets, like Randolph's, show little of the new form and pressure; but his lyric verses, again of the Jonson tribe, are often good, and sometimes excellent. The more extravagant side of the school is shown in the lines on "A Gentlewoman's Silk Hood," the better in the lines "To Chloe," to Bishop Duppa, and others.

Cartwright.

Richard Corbet,[2] Bishop of Oxford, and then, just before Hall, of Norwich, was a much older man than those just mentioned, having been born in 1582; but he did not attain to his chief distinctions till a few years before his death, which happened in the same year as Randolph's. He too was closely connected with Ben, and is said to have procured him his degree from Oxford. He appears to have been an interesting compound of a sound divine and a good fellow, and his poetical pieces, which are quite occasional, were probably spread over the greater part of his not very long life, though many of them date from the latter part of it. The best and most poetical, a charming address to his little son Vincent, combining humour and tenderness in the best English fashion, certainly does so, having been written in 1630. At purely serious poetry Corbet was not very great, but in lighter and satiric verse he anticipates Butler, Swift, and even Prior, as in his *Iter Boreale* (a title copied afterwards), his *Journey into France*, and (the strongest and bitterest of all) his "Exhortation to Mr. John Hammond" and "Distracted Puritan." Moreover, he has a charming piece on Fairies.

Corbet.

There is a certain traditional and now inseparable bond between Lovelace and Suckling. Both were unlucky Cavaliers, both illustrate the poignant charm of Cavalier poetry at its best, and both, it must be added, illustrate also the slipshod faults of this poetry at its worst. Both, moreover, give us, better than any others, the link of transition from the first to the second lyrical Caroline school, from Herrick and Carew to Dorset and Sedley. The short life of Sir John Suckling[3] is partly mythical. He was of a good though not great family, was educated at Westminster perhaps,

Suckling.

[1] Chalmers, vol. vi. [2] See Chalmers.

[3] Ed. W. C. Hazlitt, 2 vols. London, 1874.

and Trinity College, Cambridge, certainly, became early master of a great fortune, lavished it in travel, in court frivolities, and (at the breaking out of the war with Scotland) in equipping a troop of horse who did no credit to themselves and their leader, was a strong Royalist in the Long Parliament, and had to fly to the Continent, was perhaps a victim of the Inquisition in Spain, and perhaps poisoned himself at Paris in 1642. Suckling's excess of wealth over birth, and perhaps his careless living, seem to have excited some ill-feeling against him, but there is little solid proof that he was a cowardly prodigal and fribble, and we should certainly prefer not to think the author of the "Ballad on a Wedding" anything of the kind. Besides that charming piece and his plays (see as in other cases *post*), with some letters, etc., he has left a parcel of poems, occasional, satirical (his *Session of the Poets*, which not improbably earned him his bad reputation, was constantly imitated), and above all amatory, of a curious and original kind, indicated at once in the words—

> There never yet was honest man
> Who ever drove the trade of love,

upon which text the poets and play-writers dwelt with unwearying iteration for the next half-century and more. Suckling, however, though neither a refined nor a very passionate writer, does not reach the dull brutality of loveless commerce which disgraces the worst writers of the next age and too often taints the best. His is the real "elfin laughter," the true tricksiness of Cupid, which even Rochester, even Congreve, turned to sordid treachery and ribald coarseness later. Everything with Suckling turns to a ripple of merriment. "Love's World" reads like, and perhaps is, a designed burlesque of the metaphysical altitudes.

> 'Tis now since I sat down before
> That foolish fort, a heart,

is the very triumph of the style, unless

> Out upon it! I have loved
> Three whole days together;

or the universally known

> Why so pale and wan, fond lover?

demand the preference. The poet is not always quite so frivolous; there are poems, and good ones, of his which might pass muster as serious, but one always suspects that they are not.

Richard Lovelace[1] derives his just immortality from two or three pieces of exactly the opposite kind. He was of a better family than Suckling, but like him very wealthy, being the heir to great estates in Kent. He was born at Woolwich in 1618, educated at Charterhouse and at Gloucester Hall, Oxford, was prevented from taking part in the Civil War by being committed to the Gatehouse and held to enormous bail in 1642, but contrived to help the King's cause with much money, fought abroad at Dunkirk and elsewhere, and returning to England in 1648, was again imprisoned. He was released, but as a ruined man, and he died in Gunpowder Alley, Shoe Lane, two years before the Restoration. Meanwhile his beloved Lucy Sacheverall—"Lucasta"—had married another under the belief that he was dead, and Lovelace, one of the handsomest men of his time, beloved by all, rich, well-born, and of rare abilities, died thus almost *miserrimus*. He published *Lucasta* in 1649, and ten years later a brother added *Posthumous Poems*. He wrote plays, but they perished. The greater part of his work is worthless, and some of it almost unintelligible, owing to the strange decay which came on verse about this time, and to very careless printing. But "On Going to the Wars" and "To Althea from Prison" defy the greatest things of the greatest poets in absolute achievement of their particular purpose, and there are charming passages in "The Grasshopper."

Lovelace.

From these two mainly, and especially from Suckling, proceed a school of songsters who, as has been said, did not absolutely cease till the death of Sedley in the year after that of Dryden. Dryden himself has some claims to belong to them, but there is still a difference of cast, hard to define but easy to perceive, and all his work had best be handled in the next period. Marvell, at his best almost the equal of any in this chapter, Davenant, and that remarkable isolation, Chamberlayne, may be placed apart. For our purposes the group may be composed, again in loosely chronological order, of Sherburne, Bishop King, Stanley, Godolphin, Brome, and Cotton among the school more especially of Charles I. Rochester, Dorset, Sedley, and Mrs. Behn, the more definitely Restoration group, can be postponed. To these a fringe or fringes might be added very copiously, for the second and third quarters of the seventeenth century swarmed with poets and poetasters.

Of these last may be mentioned John Cleveland, who was born at Hinckley in 1613, became a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, took refuge at Oxford with other Cambridge Cavaliers, was imprisoned under the Commonwealth, and died of fever in 1658. Cleveland is rather unfairly known by some citations of conceits in Johnson's dis-

[1] Ed. W. C. Hazlitt, London, 1864.

quisition on the metaphysicals prefixed to his Life of Cowley, and he has not recently been reprinted. Even Dryden soon after the Restoration sneers at him; and his name became a byword for extravagances of style. He had, however, no little vigour, chiefly shown in his "State" Poems, the longest of which is a furious onslaught on the Scots for their betrayal of Charles. It is at least curious to compare his elegy on Edward King with *Lycidas*, and in his outrageous debauch of figure and fancy we may charitably allow a suspicion of humorous and conscious exaggeration. Wild, author of a second *Iter Boreale* and the sharer of Dryden's sarcasm, was a very inferior Cleveland who survived the Restoration; Flatman, a poet and painter with an unlucky name who wrote some charming songs, and whom Pope found "good to steal from." Flecknoe, notorious for Dryden's unceremonious use of his name in his satire on Shadwell, has a fine poem on "Silence" and some other good things. Patrick Carey's *Trivial Poems and Triolets* (1651) are pleasant for more than their form and the fact that Scott re-edited them. But of these, as of Benlowes, and Beedome and Baron, Hall and Heath and Hooke, Tatham and Kynaston, Prestwich and Shepherd, no account in any detail can be given here.[1]

Cleveland and others.

The life of Andrew Marvell[2] and his work both fall into two sharply divided and curiously contrasted sections. In the first he is a quiet student, a passionate lyrical poet of love and nature, and if of Puritan leanings and surroundings, gently inclined to what is noble in the other side; in the second he is, perhaps an austere patriot, certainly a violent politician, and poetically a ferocious lampooner in rough couplets. We may confine ourselves here to his earlier, and as literature better, period. He was born in 1621 at Winestead, not far from Hull, and went early to Cambridge, where he took his Bachelor's but not his Master's degree. He seems to have travelled a good deal, but we find him in 1649 at home, contributing to the collection of elegies on Lord Hastings which saw Dryden's first work, and being the friend of Richard Lovelace. Indeed, the splendid lines on the execution of Charles I., and others, show him as at least partly Royalist at this time. In 1650, however, Fairfax made him his daughter's tutor, and for this reason or that Marvell seems to have changed his politics. He was long resident with his young pupil at Nun Appleton, in Yorkshire, and wrote there much of his most delightful verse.

Marvell.

[1] Specimens of most of these will be found in Ellis, Campbell, and Mr. Bullen's *Speculum Amantis* and *Musa Proterva*. Benlowes and others, with Chamberlayne, Marmion (*v. inf.* p. 438), and yet others mentioned or not mentioned elsewhere, appear fully in a collection of *Minor Caroline Poets* which has been begun by the present writer (Clarendon Press, 1905).

[2] Ed. Aitken, 2 vols. London, 1892.

Becoming an admirer of Cromwell and a friend of Milton, he entered Parliament even before the Restoration, and sat for Hull till his death in 1678. For some years he was abroad doing diplomatic work, but latterly he fell more and more into Opposition.

His best, and indeed his only really, poetical work was done before he had reached middle life, and exhibits, with a form individual and in a type more chastened and classical, the best characteristics of the Cavalier poets. The exquisite octosyllables of the long poem on "Appleton House," and the shorter and still better known ones on "The Bermudas" and "The Nymph regretting the loss of her Fawn," unite Jonson's art with Herrick's grace. "The Coronet," in style between Crashaw and Vaughan, is free from the rococo ornament of the first and the tongue-tied inequality of the second; the passionate magnificence of the Amorists, whom Milton so tastelessly scorned, has no nobler examples than "To his Coy Mistress," and still more "The Definition of Love," with its splendid beginning—

> My love is of a birth as rare
> As 'tis for object, strange and high—
> It was begotten of Despair
> Upon Impossibility;

and the majesty in style of the "Horatian Ode" (to Cromwell, but containing the lines on his victim) is among the noblest and most individual of the kind in English. Nor can it be said that Marvell, like most of his school and time, wrote unequally; so that it is only curious that he did not write more. But perhaps it is not fanciful to argue that the peculiar and indeed unique perfection of phrase characterising the best poetry of this period involved a kind of mental effort of gestation which could not be repeated very often, and which obliged the poet to be either unequal or else infertile.

Bishop King.

Henry King,[1] a typical poet of this period (who is likely to keep his place in English literature by at least one exquisite piece of love-verse, "Tell me no more how fair she is," and by a part claim to "Like to the falling of a star," one of those sets of verses which so caught the fancy of the time that they exist in many different forms and are attributed as originally the work of more than two different men), was born at Worminghall in Bucks in 1592, was educated at Westminster and Christ Church, received preferment early (his father was Bishop of London), but justified it both by abilities and virtues, was the friend of Jonson, Donne, whose executor he was, and Howell the epistoler, became Canon of Christchurch, Dean of Winchester, and Bishop of Chichester, was much despoiled and ill-treated during the Rebellion, but recovered his see

[1] Ed. (incompletely) by Rev. J. Hannah, Oxford and London, 1843.

at the Restoration, and died in 1669. His poems were partly published in 1657. The influence of his great friend Donne is obvious, and though King had not anything like Donne's strength or the strangeness of his charm, yet "Tell me no more how fair she is" is perfect in its kind.

Sherburne, Godolphin, Stanley, Cotton, Brome.

Of the five Cavalier poets[1] mentioned together above, most were actively engaged in the war, or at least active members of the Royalist party. Edward Sherburne, afterwards knighted, and the son of a knight of the same name, was born in London in 1618, was educated abroad (he was a Roman Catholic), and became clerk of the Ordnance, but lost his place and his liberty in 1642. On his release he joined the King's army, but chiefly studied at Oxford till the triumph of the Parliament, when he lost all his property. He recovered his Ordnance post at the Restoration, but lost it as a Roman Catholic at the Revolution, and did not die till 1702. Much of his not extensive poetical work is translated from authors and languages ancient and modern. His originals, reminding us of Carew on the profane side, of Crashaw on the sacred, have sufficient charm of their own, yet perhaps never show quite at the best of the style. Thomas Stanley, a cousin of Sherburne's, has kept remembrance better as the author of the first English *History of Philosophy*, and as the editor of an excellent edition of Aeschylus, than as a poet, but, as was not uncommon at the time, great and genuine learning by no means extinguished poetry in him. He was the son of a rich man, and though a strong Royalist, does not seem to have been much incommoded. He was born in 1624, educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and died in 1678, having lived chiefly in the Temple. He sang mainly of love, and well. Another of the group, Sidney Godolphin, uncle of the future Lord Treasurer, and himself celebrated by Clarendon, had the good fortune to die young and gloriously fighting in Hopton's triumphant campaign at Chagford in 1642. He was not much over thirty at his death, having been born in 1610. He had entered Exeter College, Oxford, at fourteen, and with Trevanion, Slanning, and Sir Bevil Grenvil, was the flower of the Cavaliers of the West. He, like his friends, was both translator and original writer, and though his work is not great in bulk, he has the ineffable ring of the time in many more places than this:

Oh love me less or love me more,
And play not with my liberty;
Either take all or all restore,
Bind me at least, or set me free.

[1] Sherburne, Cotton, and Brome are in Chalmers.

Brome and Cotton were of somewhat less limited production, but also of a less rare style. Alexander Brome (to be distinguished from Richard, the playwright, whose plays he edited) was a Londoner and an attorney. He was born in 1620 and died in 1666. It does not appear that he took any active part for the King, but very many of the songs and lampoons by which the Cavaliers kept up their spirits between Rebellion and Restoration are attributed to him; he has Izaak Walton's good word, which could have been given to no bad man; and some of his light and careless ditties have the true vein of jovial and not ignoble song. If he is sometimes coarse, he stopped far short of the unpleasant excesses of others in that direction, and there is tenderness in his love-poems, fire in his Bacchanalia, sincerity in his political songs, and wit, whim, and spirit everywhere. Charles Cotton of Beresford Hall, Staffordshire, is known to most people as Walton's colleague and pupil in the *Complete Angler;* to some as the author of the admirable "New Year Poem," admired by Lamb; to a few as the writer of many other pleasant verses, including the last *rondeaux* that English saw for a century; and to fewer still, it may be hoped, by the unworthy following of Scarron and Butler combined, called *Virgil Travestie.* As a prose writer he is kept in some memory by his translation of Montaigne, though it was not in the least wanted after Florio. His original poems, very numerous, very unequal, and often very slight, are sometimes at least very happy.

Hardly one of the authors as yet mentioned in this chapter was voluminous; we must now turn to those of their time who were. Butler, though really of it, is so mixed up with the history of Restoration literature that he may be postponed, Davenant, Quarles, Chamberlayne, More, and Beaumont must find place. Four of these writers, very popular in their time, are now merely curiosities, the fifth has never been much known, but was a writer of singular talent. The most voluminous of all was Francis Quarles,[1] who was born of a good Essex family near Romford, in 1592, was a member of Christ's College, Cambridge, and of Lincoln's Inn, and held divers appointments in court, city, and the lay offices of the Church. He just survived the breaking out of the Rebellion, and died in 1644. His work is enormous: he would versify anything from the *Arcadia* to the *Lamentations.* Little of his is now remembered except his famous *Emblems;* and he wrote prose, of which again nothing survives in the general memory but the *Enchiridion.* There are good things in Quarles; but it requires a great deal of leisure to find them out, and they are

Quarles, More, Beaumont.

[1] Quarles is reprinted in three, Beaumont in two, and More in one, of the quarto volumes of Dr. Grosart's privately printed "Chertsey Worthies' Library."

so fragmentary as hardly to be capable of separate representation. Henry More and Joseph Beaumont carried the dubious Spenserianism of the Fletchers yet farther by writing immense poems on philosophical theology. More's enormous *Song of the Soul* in Spenserians, and even Beaumont's more enormous *Psyche* in sixains, are not to be spoken of without respect, the first being certainly the work of a man who had poetry in him. But the choice of subject in each case was problematical, the choice of scale in both fatal.

The middle of the century saw two other long poems of much more human interest. Both were the work of ardent Cavaliers; both deserted alike the classical epic and the allegorical romance for a novel kind of story founded, no doubt, in each case (though the fact has not been always recognised) on the French heroic novel, but treated with independence. One, however, distinctly anticipated the change of taste which was coming, and was, either for that reason or because of its author's busy and not unamiable character, immediately, widely, and for some time popular. The other, except in scheme and subject, looked backward, and seems to have been almost entirely neglected. These are the *Gondibert* of Sir William Davenant and the *Pharonnida* of William Chamberlayne.

Davenant.

Davenant[1] was born at Oxford in 1605, the son of an innkeeper, but had some connection with Shakespeare, wrote verses (and not bad ones) on his death, and was well educated at Lincoln College. He was taken up by Lord Brooke and others, and produced his tragedy of *Albovine* in 1628, when most of the second school of Elizabethans, and some of the first, were still living and writing. Ten years later he succeeded Jonson as Laureate, became a playhouse manager, and both in these capacities and as a busy servant of the King, and (still worse) of the Queen, fell into very bad odour with the Puritan party. He served, was captured, and thrown into prison. He even seems to have been in some serious danger, but is said to have been saved by Milton, whose kindness he afterwards returned in the time of the greater poet's own peril. If the stories are true, he thus knew the three greatest men of letters (for he was later intimate with Dryden) of the three generations of the century; and he was in more ways than one an ingenious and interesting man of letters himself.

He was not, however, a great poet, though his miscellaneous verse is sometimes pretty, and *Gondibert* is not a great poem. It was written on principle, and is ushered not by the usual crowd of commendatory verses from anybody and nobody, but by two copies only, from the great Mr. Cowley and the great Mr. Waller, and by

[1] *Gondibert*, with Davenant's other poems, is to be found in Chalmers.

letters to and from Mr. Hobbes. To this last Davenant explains his principles at great length, and Hobbes replies that he never yet saw poem that had so much shape of art, health of morality, beauty of expression, as this *Gondibert* (which was not finished). It is a poem in three books, each of several cantos, and some 1700 or 1800 quatrains—a form which for some time marked, and very slightly arrested, the inevitable transition from the longer stanzas to couplet and blank verse. The scene is Lombardy, and especially Verona; the theme the affections of the hero as tending towards Rhodalind or towards Birtha, two damsels equally "bright of blee," with fighting and other things. But the stanza is not well suited for narratives of great length, and the verse, though occasionally weighty and dignified, is too often wooden; while, except in Birtha, there is little attempt at character.

Chamberlayne.

Pharonnida[1] is a very much better thing, though by no means a perfect one. Of its author little is known. He was born about 1620, practised as a physician, and died in 1689, at Shaftesbury in Dorsetshire. He was a good Cavalier and fought at the battle of Newbury. He tells us himself that he had few literary friends. Besides *Pharonnida* (published in 1659, and in its author's lifetime turned into a prose romance under the title of *Eromena*), he had a year earlier published a play, *Love's Victories*, which seems to have been acted twenty years after, also with its title changed. It is a somewhat confused piece (see next chapter) of the Brome and Nabbes kind, more poetical, with some very fine flashes, but not worth much as a whole.

Pharonnida, on the contrary, is worth a great deal, though as far as possible from being faultless. It is difficult to agree with Campbell (the first of the few who have praised it) that it is "one of the most interesting stories ever told in verse," for this story, such as it is, is extremely incoherent, and the personages are mere stock romantic types—Pharonnida, a virgin in danger; her lover Argalia, a compound of Joseph, Amadis, and Hector; and so forth. Further, the ugly colloquialisms which were then invading both verse and prose—especially that ugliest "to's" for "to his," and the like—deface it. But the versification, which represents a further development from Wither and Browne, is, though too much "enjambed," often charmingly melodious; some of the episodes—especially that at Rhodes, with the fate of Janusa, which Campbell has given, not quite completely—are of great force and interest, and above all the spirit of romance pervades the whole, while the separate phrases and passages of beauty are literally innumerable. It has five books, each

[1] 3 vols. (*Love's Victories* is in the third) London, 1820.

in several cantos like *Gondibert*, and must contain from twelve to fifteen thousand verses. But it is not rash to say that of the nearly five hundred pages which contain them hardly one can be read without finding some notable poetic fragment, and few without finding more than one such thing as we may search the whole poetry of the eighteenth century with little chance of paralleling.

Miscellanies.

The Miscellanies and Song-books of the Elizabethan period proper continued, through its Jacobean and Caroline appendices, in slightly changed fashions, which must be at least glanced at here The books of this class may be best divided into two varieties which often crossed each other. The ballad,[1] the rise of which was sketched formerly, received especial attention during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and certain individual fashioners of it, Thomas Delony, Elderton, Martin Parker, are known. The bulk of the examples preserved for us by the fortunate fancies of Pepys and other collectors is enormous, and from time to time bundles were printed under divers titles, some of them very pretty,[2] in which the word *Garland* is often conspicuous. But there were also more literary collections,[3] in which not a little of the work of poets mentioned already occurs, with a good deal that is anonymous, this latter sometimes including charming things such as the famous "Phillida (Phillada) flouts me." At about the time of the Restoration these books were apt to assume the title of *Drollery*, which persevered for a good many years, till Dryden stamped *Miscellany* with his seal. To judge the progress of literature one must read most of these things; but the result of the reading is not easy to summarise. As the century went on, the coarseness (sometimes reaching brutality) which was provoked and fostered by Puritanism stains them. Yet even in the dullest and most offensive deserts, things like

> And the Star Chamber of her eyes
> Robs subjects of their liberties,

make diversion and amends.

[1] The labours of the Ballad Society, with the more especial help of Mr. Chappell, Dr. Furnivall, and Mr. Ebsworth, have laid these pretty well at our disposal.

[2] There can hardly, for instance, be a prettier than *The Crown Garland of Golden Roses*, compiled by R. Johnson (Percy Society, 1842-45). The contents only sometimes correspond.

[3] *Musarum Deliciae*, *Wit Restored*, *Wit's Recreations*, the *Rump Poems* (reprinted, London, *n.d.*, 4 vols.), and the *Merry*, *Westminster*, and *Choice Drolleries* (ed. Ebsworth, 3 vols. Boston, *v.d.*) may stand as examples, being those which the writer knows best.

CHAPTER III

THE DRAMA TILL THE CLOSING OF THE THEATRES

Massinger—Ford—Shirley—Randolph—Suckling—Davenant—Brome—Nabbes and Davenport—Glapthorne

WITH due observation of the caution (which may seem tediously repeated, but is still necessary) as to the overlapping of periods in the brief, crowded, and intensely active years of the drama called Elizabethan, we shall find a more than sufficiently well-marked character in its third and last stage, though the best men—Massinger, Ford, Shirley—were not very young.

Massinger.

Philip Massinger,[1] son of a gentleman-dependant of the Pembroke family, was born in 1583, went to St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, and seems to have remained at the University till about the usual age of five or six and twenty. We do not know how or when he made his way to London and began play-writing, though he was, on documentary evidence, engaged in that occupation as early as 1614; but the earliest thing of his that we have is *The Virgin Martyr*, which was acted in 1622. He died seventeen years later, in 1639, and was buried in St. Saviour's, Southwark, a church of many literary connections. It was not that of his own parish, for he was entered as "a stranger." Thus he is nearly as little known to us personally as his colleague in *The Virgin Martyr*, Dekker himself.

But in his literary character we know him very well. Of nearly two-score plays recorded and ascribed to him, rather more than half are lost, but the eighteen that remain[2] exhibit him in sufficiently varied lights, and the total judgment of him would probably not be much altered if we had the rest. The general impression which he gives, when he is compared with his predecessors, is that of

[1] *Works*, ed. Gifford, with those of Ford and an Introduction by Hartley Coleridge ("new edition," London, 1859).

[2] With *Sir John Van Olden Barneveldt* (*Old Plays*, ed. A. H. Bullen, vol. ii.) as a not improbable addition, though there is no evidence of authorship.

a slight increase of artificiality accompanied by—and no doubt due to—a corresponding decrease in original and spontaneous genius. Massinger's tragedies are never the mere blood-and-thunder muddles of which we have so many before him, and they have many noble scenes and passages, especially in *The Unnatural Combat*, *The Duke of Milan*, *The Bondman*, *The Picture*, *The Roman Actor*, *The Fatal Dowry*; but with the exception of *The Virgin Martyr* itself, where the difference is fairly set down to the hand of Dekker, we find little or nothing of the ineffable snatches of poetry of the earlier drama, and an inability to strike out those fresh and not impossible, if not always very probable, types of character which (not to mention Shakespeare) we find even in Beaumont and Fletcher. So also his comedies never quite descend to the level of those mere heaps of less or more amusing scenes compacted into no dramatic story, and not even connected by the thread of any one vivid character, which we find earlier in Middleton, and later in Brome, and Nabbes, and others of his younger contemporaries. But hardly more than twice, in the famous *New Way to Pay Old Debts* (by far his greatest play, in which the usurer and tyrant Sir Giles Overreach is worthy of Jonson at least) and in *The City Madam*, does he rise to distinction in comedy. On the whole, however, the greatest of the great race cease with him, for he as far surpasses Shirley in intensity and in the goodness of his best things, as he does Ford—his superior in these points—in range, bulk, variety, and comparative freedom from the morbid. His blank verse is very good, less musical than Beaumont and Fletcher's, but free from that perilous pressing of the "points" which is observable in the later work of the survivor of them, admirably suited for stately declamation, and yet of sufficient variety. And he has a certain indefinable faculty of giving a good account of almost any subject handled by him. That he has had few passionate admirers is due probably to the fact that he rather attains and keeps a high level of general craftsmanship than shoots to solitary heights of individual artistic success. But, since Gifford, he has been generally set too low, and Gifford did not value him quite aright.

Ford.

He should indeed gain, not lose, by the contrast with his contemporary John Ford.[1] Ford does go higher than Massinger; he has received warmer praise by far; it is considered as a mark of Philistinism to set any limitation to estimates of him. Yet it is noticeable that wherever Ford is at his best he avails himself of illegitimate aids. His very best play, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, brings on the scene the passion of a brother for a sister, and his next best, *The Broken Heart*, piles up the agony by the most preposterous and improbable means. Ford cannot do with nature; he

[1] Ed. Gifford and Hartley Coleridge, as above; also Dyce, reprinted 1895.

must go against or beyond her to fetch effects of tragedy, and in doing this he stands condemned and excluded from the first order of poets of his own time, or indeed of any. The inspiration of the unnatural is the "Dutch courage" of poetry.

He was not, like most of his rivals, a writer for a living, though he seems to have worked pretty hard for those by no means lavish paymasters the theatrical managers. He wrote plays in the second, third, and fourth decades of the century; but he was a member of a good Devonshire house, the Fords of Ilsington, was connected with others, was a member of Lincoln's Inn, though we have no record of his being at either University. As early as 1606 he celebrated the death of Lord Mountjoy, the last lover and, after a fashion, second husband of Sidney's Stella. When he ceased writing or when he died we do not know, and we have very few notices of him, the chief being the often-quoted one in a *Drollery*, which is not unpicturesque—

> Deep in a dump alone John Ford was got [gat],
> With folded arms and melancholy hat.

Sixteen plays are attributed to him alone or in collaboration. We have lost *Beauty in a Trance*, destroyed by Warburton's cook, but entered in the Stationers' books as late as 1653. *The London Merchant*, *The Royal Comedy*, and *An Ill Beginning has a good End*, also destroyed by this same evil cook, appeared still later in 1660, with apparently no collaborator in any. Ford and Dekker are responsible for *The Fairy Knight* and *The Bristowe Merchant* (of which from Dekker we should have preferred the former), and Ford and Webster for *The Murder of the Son upon the Mother*, which from the authors of *The Broken Heart* and *The Duchess of Malfy* must have been full of horrors indeed. We have remaining the curious play of *The Witch of Edmonton*, in which Ford took part with Rowley, Dekker, and others; *The Sun's Darling*, by Ford and Dekker, and worthy of neither except that it has some of the charming lyrics which Ford could never manage alone, but which mark the passage of Dekker everywhere. *The Fancies Chaste and Noble*, *Love's Sacrifice*, *The Lady's Trial* are all feeble, and *Love's Sacrifice* offensive; so that the pieces on which his fame rests are the pair already mentioned, with *The Lover's Melancholy* and *Perkin Warbeck*. This last has the perhaps not very high honour of being one of the best of plays on an English historical subject out of Shakespeare; *The Lover's Melancholy*, a graceful but rather feeble piece, is principally famous for one of the verse transcripts (Crashaw did another) of Strada's prolusion on the nightingale and the lute-player. But neither can enter into competition with the other two, and it is by these that Ford's reputation stands or falls.

The third of the most notable poets of Charles's reign, James Shirley,[1] was somewhat, but not very much, younger than Massinger and Ford. He was a Londoner, and was born in 1596 (thus vindicating the right of the drama of which he was the last distinguished practitioner to be called Elizabethan). He was educated at Merchant Taylors' and hence passed not merely to the natural university destination of its scholars, St. John's College, Oxford, but also to Catherine Hall, Cambridge. He was ordained in the Church of England but went over to Rome, and became a schoolmaster, between which occupation and the writing of plays he hovered for the greater part of his tolerably long life. He, as well as his wife, is said to have died of fright, and perhaps exposure, in consequence of the fire of London in 1666. Shirley.

Shirley's work, what with masques and what with plays, is very voluminous, extending to some forty pieces with a few non-dramatic poems. To the general reader he is hardly known except by the famous lyric, "The glories of our blood and state," contained in one of the latest of his entertainments, *The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses*. Yet he was a playwright for some forty years, his first piece, *Love Tricks*, having appeared in 1625. Other comedies are *The Witty Fair One* (1628), *The Wedding*, *The Ball*, *Hyde Park*, *The Changes*, *The Lady of Pleasure*. Among his tragedies we may name *The Traitor* and *The Cardinal*; the first named of which is his best in this way, as *The Lady of Pleasure* is his best in the other.

Shirley, almost more than any other of the great race, has suffered both from over-praise and over-blame, as well as from the want of reading as a whole, which he especially needs.[2] In original power he is undoubtedly the least of the series which he ends: he has no great plays, hardly any great scenes, and not very many distinguished passages. In him, almost for the first time, we detect a certain distinct imitation, the "literary" note. On the other hand his plays are very generally readable as wholes, and have a certain gain in coherence and congruity, even though they, for the most part, belong to a very loosely constructed scheme of drama. He does not fall into the astonishing and almost inconceivable hodge-podge of prose that is

[1] There is still but one edition of Shirley—excellent, but rather scarce and rather dear—that of Gifford and Dyce, 6 vols. London, 1833. Those who cannot attain to it will find six complete plays, *The Witty Fair One*, *The Traitor*, *Hyde Park*, *The Lady of Pleasure*, *The Cardinal*, and the *Triumph of Peace*, in a single volume of the "Mermaid Series," edited by Mr. Gosse (London, 1888). This series also contains useful selections of complete plays from nearly all the chief Elizabethans.

[2] This statement is not made at random, but after a consecutive reading of him for the purposes of this volume. It has distinctly raised the opinions formed years ago on a more piecemeal acquaintance.

not prose, and verse that is not verse, which we find in men like Davenant and Suckling, but can write more than fair verse when he chooses this, and very fair prose when he chooses that. Indeed, now and then his verse rises to a melancholy sweetness which admirably suits his best notes of character and tone—notes of a rather feminine grace and a slightly sentimental chivalry. As in tragedy he stops short of horrors generally, so in comedy he abstains generally from obscenity. After the Restoration he fell into disrepute—on the one hand Pepys sneers at his individual plays, and on the other the almost always generous Dryden takes Shirley as a type of dulness. But this is quite unjust, and he is even a direct link between Fletcher and the distinctive Restoration comedy in all its better and some of its worse ways. He was undoubtedly unlucky in coming just where he did, and may be said to have fallen between two generations. Yet he by no means unworthily ends his own great class.

Even in these three greater men—certainly in Shirley—signs, if not of decadence, of at any rate of impending change, are manifest; in nearly all the minor playwrights of the period these signs become flagrant. The most promising of this group is Randolph,[1] whose dramatic works, *Aristippus*, *The Conceited Pedlar*, *The Jealous Lovers*, *The Muses' Looking-Glass*, *Amyntas*, and *Down with Knavery*, all show the influence of the classics both directly and through Jonson. *Amyntas* and *The Muses' Looking-Glass* are the best, but no one is absolutely good, and all labour under the defect of being rather exercises in different schools of drama than original compositions. Sir John Suckling's[2] plays again, to continue with those dramatists who were also more or less considerable poets, form a curious contrast to his poems. The versification shows almost every fault of which dramatic verse is capable, and which had been or was to be shown by English dramatists. It is by turns as stiff as *Gorboduc* and as loose as the worst imitations of Fletcher's later redundances, while, like play-verse generally at this time and for some years to come, till Dryden tightened things up again, it very often slips and flounders about as if it never could make up its mind to be verse or prose, heroics or doggerel. The prettily named tragedies of *Brennoralt*, *The Sad One*, and *Aglaura* (the last of which has two fifth acts as fishing-rods have two tops) are strange nondescripts, blending echoes of Shakespeare, who was very popular at Charles the First's court, with imitations of the heroic novels. *The Goblins*, a comedy, is rather amusing but wildly chaotic.

Randolph.

Suckling.

[1] Edition as for Poems.

[2] Ed. Hazlitt, 2 vols. London, 1874.

Davenant's [1] verse in his plays is not much better than Suckling's, but, partly by accident, he is a more important person in the history of the stage if not of the literary drama. It has been said that he began as a playwright with *Albovine* (1628), *The Cruel Brother*, and other things, quite early, and he followed them up with others—*The Wits*, *News from Plymouth*, *The Fair Favourite*, *The Unfortunate Lovers*, *Love and Honour*, etc., none of them very good plays and all of them in very bad verse—verse so bad that one suspects some convention of deliberate badness, as in the case of the satirists. But when Davenant, long after the theatres were closed, had secured his liberty through Milton, and perhaps also through him had become acquainted with Cromwell, he used his influence with the Protector to obtain permission (1656) for the performance of musical entertainments, which practically restarted the drama itself. Notice of these will come better in the next Book. Davenant.

The most prolific playwright, however, of this time was Richard Brome.[2] We know next to nothing of Brome except that he was dead in 1653, and that at one time he was servant to Ben Jonson, who mentions him by no means unkindly, though others, to curry favour with Ben, or out of spite to Brome, spoke of his plays as the sweepings of Jonson's study. They are, as we have them edited by his namesake Alexander, fifteen in number, and they belong, without exception, to that rather nondescript class of plays of contemporary manners which has been already noted under the heads of Middleton, Jonson, and Fletcher. The best of them are *The Northern Lass* (in which Constance the heroine is made to speak a sort of Scots) and *The Jovial Crew*, a very merry picture of gipsy life. All the rest, *The Sparagus Garden*, *A Mad Couple well Matched*, *The City Wit*, *The Lovesick Court*, *The Queen and Concubine*, *The Antipodes*, *The Novella*, *The Court Beggar*, *The Damoiselle*, *The English Moor*, *Covent Garden Weeded*, *The New Exchange*, resemble each other curiously. We read them without too much belief in their pictures of manners, and yet recognising traits here and there as from the life. Brome.

Of Thomas Nabbes,[3] a weaker Brome, we know even less—nothing, in short, except that he once drank some good strong beer at Droitwich, and seems generally to have haunted Worcestershire. His plays, *Covent Garden*, *Tottenham Court* (names indicating the style), *Hannibal and Scipio*, a weak play of a more ambitious sort, *The Bride*, *The Unfortunate Mother*, Nabbes and Davenport.

[1] Ed. Maidment and Logan, 5 vols. Edinburgh, 1882.

[2] Reprinted in 3 vols. London, 1873.

[3] Nabbes is given in two and Davenport in one of Mr. Bullen's "New Series" of *Old Plays;* their best-known pieces are in Hazlitt's *Dodsley*.

with the moral masque of *Microcosmus*, by which he has been most generally known, and which is perhaps his best thing—all seem to have been produced between 1638 and the closing of the theatres. Robert Davenport[1] was an older writer if not an older man, for he had a historical play, now lost, licensed in 1624, and another, *King John and Matilda*, his best thing, has been thought to be not much younger, though we hear nothing of it till 1639, and it was not printed till still later. *The City Nightcap*, which ranks with it, but is a comedy, must have been as old in years as the histories, and there is a third existing play of some merit, *A New Trick to Cheat the Devil*, which was published in 1639. Davenport certainly wrote other plays, and those which we have are good enough to make us wish for what we have not. A similar wish would perhaps be more difficult in the case of Henry Glapthorne, of whom again so little is known that his editor[2] has thought it necessary to print some documents about a *George* Glapthorne, not known to be in the slightest degree connected with the dramatist. We have of his a certain number of poems, mostly in couplets, and in a feeble style, and five plays—*Albertus Wallenstein* (more interesting from its subject than from itself), *Argalus and Parthenia*, one of the numerous dressings up of the *Arcadia*, *Wit in a Constable*, *The Lady's Privilege*, and *The Hollander*. Perhaps he wrote *The Lady Mother*. He is something of a poet, but very little of a dramatist.

Glapthorne.

Besides these the fifteen years or thereabouts of Caroline drama provide the names of Shakerley Marmion, who besides a rather pretty poem, *Cupid and Psyche*, produced at least three extant plays, the best of which is *The Antiquary*, long known from its inclusion in *Dodsley;* Sir Aston Cokain, the author of *The Obstinate Lady*, *Trappolin Creduto Principe*, and *Ovid;* Thomas May, rival of Davenant for the Laureateship (and it is said from spite at his non-success), afterwards a Commonwealth's man and historian of the Long Parliament, who has left us *The Heir* and *The Old Couple;* Cartwright, whose *Ordinary* has merit; and Dr. Jasper Mayne, whose *City Match* has more. All deserve respectable places in a separate history of the drama, and all deserve mention here.[3]

[1] See note 3 on preceding page. [2] 2 vols. London, 1874.

[3] Cokain and Marmion figure in volumes of the Edinburgh *Dramatists of the Restoration;* the others will be found in Hazlitt's *Dodsley*. For yet other scattered plays of known and unknown authors during the three divisions of the "Elizabethan Period" which cannot find room here, I may be permitted to refer the more curious student to my *Elizabethan Literature*, pp. 423-427.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE ENGLISH PULPIT—II

Jeremy Taylor—Fuller—South—Barrow—Baxter, Chillingworth, Hales, and others

NOT the least admirable and remarkable division of Caroline literature is that peopled by the Sermon-writers. Indeed, taking advantage of the facts that of Hall and Donne, the chief ornaments of the earlier period, one survived Charles I. himself and the other saw the first ten years of his reign, and that, under Charles II., another and only less great race arises, with a slightly different style, it has been not uncommon to speak of the great divines in a body as Caroline. We shall here, as before, borrow from the Second Charles those divines who, under him, still exhibited the graces more specially attributable to English under his father, and postpone those who, like Tillotson, are rather eighteenth than seventeenth century in character.

The greatest of the group thus provided are Taylor, Fuller, and South—the last a much younger man than the others, and a severe critic of them, as well as a survivor into the reign of the last Stuart who occupied the throne, but still distinctly Caroline and not Augustan in spirit; the midmost of the three, the wittiest of English divines except Sydney Smith, and much more of a divine than Sydney; the first in almost all ways the chief of English orators on sacred subjects. These three display the characteristics of the time so well that a fairly careful survey of them will enable us to pass more rapidly over their fellows.

Jeremy Taylor[1] was born at Cambridge in August 1613, and was the son of a barber. He was sent to Caius College, took his degrees there, and perhaps became Fellow, but by Laud's influence was transferred to Oxford, where in 1636 he became Fellow of All Souls. He obtained the rectory of Uppingham two years later, and married in 1639. He is guessed rather than known to have served

[1] *Works*, 3 vols. London, 1844. *Holy Living* and *Dying* exist in many separate forms, and *The Golden Grove* in some.

as chaplain in the King's army during the Rebellion, and dates are also very uncertain in regard to the death of his first wife, his marriage with a second, and his retirement (probably to her property) in Wales. Here, after some time of poverty and school-keeping, he was patronised by the Earl of Carbery, became tolerably prosperous, and during the twelve or fifteen years of his Welsh sojourn composed most of his greater works. Yet he was thrice imprisoned during this time for political and ecclesiastical malignancy. Even before the Restoration he received (rather unluckily) preferment in Ireland, being appointed by Lord Conway to a lectureship at Lisburn, and when the King came home he was made Bishop of Down, Connor, and shortly afterwards Dromore, becoming also an Irish Privy Councillor and Vice-Chancellor of Dublin University. But he was by no means happy in Ireland, where, between Roman Catholics and chiefly Presbyterian Protestants, his Laudian Anglicanism was very uncomfortably placed, and where he had domestic troubles. He died on 13th August 1667, at Lisburn, and was buried in his cathedral of Dromore.

Jeremy Taylor.

Taylor's unique position as an English churchman of letters was attained not by erudition (for though it would ill beseem most men nowadays to belittle him in this, he was for that most learned of times by no means extremely erudite), nor by his theological power (for logic was not his forte, and he more than once approached heresy unawares), nor in that special product of the time, casuistry, for which his dialectics are not delicate enough; but wholly and solely by his magnificent rhetoric. This rhetoric is so true to itself that he does not even show as a writer so well as he must have shown to his hearers, since some pretty obvious faults in the page would have been nearly imperceptible as they came from the pulpit, while all his beauties would be enhanced by actual delivery, especially as he is known to have had a handsome presence and an admirable elocution. He began as a writer in 1642 with a defence of Episcopacy, but did not show his real quality till he was safe in Wales, under the wing of Lord and Lady Carbery, the latter the Lady of *Comus*, Alice Egerton. Of the numerous works then written, *The Liberty of Prophesying* is an argument for toleration which would have been more effective if the author had been a closer reasoner, and perhaps also if he had not been on the losing side at the time. 1650 saw a *Life of Christ* and the famous *Holy Living*, which was completed next year by *Holy Dying*. A course of Sermons for the Christian Year was then begun, and finished in 1653. 1655 saw the devotional work called, from the seat of the Carberys, *The Golden Grove*, also *Unum Necessarium*, a treatise on Repentance, in some points dubiously orthodox; and in 1660 the *Ductor Dubitantium*, his chief work in

casuistry. In all these works, as well as in his numerous others, the chief of which, for our purpose, is the supplement of eleven extra sermons to the *Eniautos*, or Christian Year, it is almost a universal rule that Taylor is supreme in exhortation and rhetorical description, great (though more unequal) in meditation, and weakest in anything that requires close logical argument. It may be questioned whether his thought is ever very profound, and it is certainly never very original. We are not to look in him for anything like the infinite suggestiveness, the far-reaching vistas, of Donne. But, luckily for Taylor, his subject supplied him with depth and height enough in mere matter, and he had nothing to supply but the external graces of his inimitable expression.

Almost everything that can fairly be said against this expression is summed up in the one word "florid," and it seems practically impossible for impartial criticism to deny that this word is applicable. The presence of the quality it denotes shocked the younger generation of Taylor's own time, and is commented on in a passage, not quite so unjust as harsh and unbecoming, by South; it probably lessened Taylor's influence with the eighteenth century, and it certainly procured him abundant compensation at the time of the Romantic revolt. There can be no doubt that Taylor's flowers of speech are most exquisite and most lavishly provided. They hardly ever deserve from just criticism the epithet of tawdry. But they are something too lush in their growth; they are strung with stock devices of phrase ("so have I seen," especially) which are irritating; and their extraordinary abundance gives an air of fulsome and somewhat feminine languor and luxuriance to the style. The less good effect of this is increased by Taylor's confused grammar. Like most of his predecessors except Hooker, he never seems quite certain whether he is writing Latin or English, and abuses the license of both languages, as well as length of sentence. Yet to no person of fairly catholic taste can his defects come into any close comparison with his beauties. If he is seldom deep he is never shallow; his subjects are always noble and always worthily handled; even his plainer writing has a musical cadence and a pictorial effect. If we want something better still we can only go to Donne or Browne, and Donne, at least, if not Browne, will give it us in scantier measure, and in manner harder to receive.

A contrast, which is almost the full one between tragedy and comedy, exists between Jeremy Taylor and Thomas Fuller,[1] who was born at Aldwinkle St. Peter's, the other division of the

[1] There is no complete edition of Fuller, but most of the books mentioned are obtainable in various forms, and a collection of sermons appeared (ed. Bailey and Axon) in 1891.

village in which Dryden was born later, in the summer of 1608, his father being rector of the parish. He was sent to Queens' College, Cambridge, from which he passed to Sidney Sussex, and in 1630 obtained a curacy from a third college, Corpus or Benet. His uncle, Dr. Davenant, who had been President of Queens', was now Bishop of Salisbury, and made Fuller first a prebendary of his cathedral and then vicar of Broadwindsor, in Dorset. He wrote some verse of no merit early, and produced his *Holy War*, a history of the Crusades, in 1639, and his *Holy and Profane States* in 1642, with some sermons between them. Just before the war he was made preacher at the Savoy, and during it was an army chaplain. But his moderation, or, more probably, his humour, made him thought half-hearted by some. He printed at Exeter in 1645, when hope was almost gone, *Good Thoughts in Bad Times*, one of his very best books; and followed it in 1647 with *Better Thoughts in Worse Times*. Like some, though not many, sound divines and Royalists, he was not absolutely persecuted during the usurpation, and though he was unable to keep a post at St. Clement's, Eastcheap, he was more fortunate with one at Waltham Abbey. In 1650 he published his *Pisgah Sight of Palestine*, a book on the Holy Land, in 1655 his great *Church History of Britain*, and in 1658 his *Mixt Contemplation for Better Times*. At the Restoration he was made D.D. and chaplain to the King; and a bishopric is said to have been designed for him, but he died of some sort of typhus or typhoid in August 1661. The largest and almost the most characteristic of all his works, the *Worthies of England*, was published posthumously.

Fuller.

Fuller, like Taylor, was the darling of some of the great Englishmen of the Romantic revival, such as Coleridge, Southey, and Lamb. The last-named avowedly doted on him, has made a selection of some of his greatest phrases, and may be said to owe his style more to Fuller and Browne than to any one else. At the same time, he has been by no means universally popular. The formidable South fell foul of him almost more roughly than of Taylor just after his death; the eighteenth century regarded him as a learned buffoon; and it is by no means certain that more modern judgments have been wholly conciliated to him. Nor is this surprising, for, as has been said, the knowledge of Fuller, except among a few students, is probably by no means extensive nowadays, and his temper is one not now commonly met, and regarded, when it occurs, either with suspicion or positive dislike. Fuller's most heartfelt interests were all in serious things. He was probably not intensely interested in politics, and except that he was strongly anti-Roman, the purely ecclesiastical quarrels of his day did not excite any very bitter feelings in him; he was a true Royalist and Anglican, but not a keen

one. Yet his Christianity was the very life of him; he was an earnest student of history, especially in the lines of topography, genealogy, and heraldry. All these are of the class of subjects which—the world seems to take it for granted—ought to be treated in what some one has called "the grave and chaste manner."

But it was impossible for Fuller to be grave. No mind was ever freer from the slightest irreverence than his. But the quips and conceits of the Elizabethan time, the "metaphysical" fancies of the Jacobean, had been in some singular way seasoned in his case by an anticipation of the more purely satirical and jocular tone of the later seventeenth and earlier eighteenth century, though without a trace of the coarseness, hardness, and impiety which too often accompanied this. It is absolutely impossible for Fuller to resist a jest, whether on natural phenomena, as where he writes of wax, "It being yellow by nature is by art made red, white, and green, which I take to be the dearest colours, especially when appendant on parchment"; or in divinity, as when he observes of ejaculations or short prayers, that "the soldier may at the same time shoot out his prayer to God and aim his pistol at his enemy, the one better hitting the mark for the other." This quaint quipping wit does not appeal to all readers, especially in modern days, and is no doubt extremely annoying to some; but they are probably the wisest who can enjoy it, though it is not perhaps necessary for them to go to the extremes of laudation indulged in by Lamb and Coleridge. The range of Burton and the depth of Browne are both denied to Fuller; his temper is a very little childish in the bad sense as well as childlike in the good. But if not for all tastes, or even for all hours, as these two are, in the case of those who love them, he is no mean ornament to English literature, and no scantily-stored treasure-house of it.

If Taylor is sometimes open to the charge of effeminacy and Fuller to that of childishness, neither fault can be found with Robert South, the most masculine of English seventeenth-century writers except Hobbes, and indeed a sort of orthodox pair to that great writer. He was born at Hackney in 1633, and passed through Westminster (which certainly did not at this time, under the rule of Busby, discredit Solomon's system of education) to Christ Church, where he became a student in 1651. He took orders before the Restoration, and when that event occurred, was made public orator of his University, chaplain to Clarendon, a prebendary of Westminster, and a canon of Christ Church. He lived to a very great age, and, at any rate after his earliest manhood, was always a very strong Tory; but he was not a nonjuror, and held his preferments to his death in 1716. He was a formidable controversialist, signalising himself in this way against Sherlock; but his

South.

literary reputation rests upon his numerous and very remarkable sermons.[1] He was controversial enough even in these, as may be seen in the passages already referred to, where he makes strictures on Fuller and Taylor; and compliments have been paid to his wit almost equal to those bestowed upon Fuller himself. They are merited, always remembering that in using the word of seventeenth-century writers we must observe the sense, then more specially attached to it, of intellectual keenness, not necessarily, though very often, exhibited in relation to the ludicrous. South has still something of Elizabethan conceit and word-play, and a great deal of Jacobean scholasticism. But the new style of restricted antithetical balance which was rising around him affected him a good deal, though not to the same extent as that to which it affected Tillotson or Temple or Dryden, so that he comes in best for notice here, and not with them.

For he retains that fondness for luminous if also audacious imagery which, though certainly not absent from Dryden, or even from Temple, was to be more and more restricted both in them and in their followers. His famous sentence, "An Aristotle was but the rubbish of an Adam, and Athens but the rudiments of Paradise," unites seventeenth-century splendour of fancy—the sudden blaze of the imaginative rocket—with eighteenth-century balance, antithesis, and point. It can be matched with hundreds of single things, hardly less ingenious and successful, while South is also able to build up larger sentences, till he reminds us, not so constantly, of Browne before and Temple after him in the two styles. Thus, while he never has the beauty of Taylor, while he lacks the easy lambent light of Fuller's wit, he is in better fighting trim, better balanced, less unequal and disquieting than either, and provides in almost all his work quite admirable examples of the more scholastic prose.

Barrow.

Isaac Barrow,[2] who was a little older than South, was also a Londoner, born in 1630, but his school was Charterhouse. Hence he passed to Felsted, in Essex, and to Trinity College, Cambridge, of which he became Fellow in 1649. He was known as a strong Cavalier and Churchman, and this for the time prevented the further promotion which his extraordinary abilities, both on the literary and scientific sides, would have gained him, and he travelled much abroad. On the eve of the Restoration he became Professor of Greek at Cambridge, and after it a Fellow of the Royal Society, Gresham Professor of Geometry, and Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, where Newton followed him. The King always greatly fancied his preaching, and in 1672 made him Master

[1] 4 vols. London, 1843.

[2] *Works* (non-mathematical), ed. Napier, 9 vols. Cambridge, 1859.

of Trinity, but he died five years later. Barrow's style is less severe than South's, but also a little less technically good, more disposed to long and wandering sentences, though in other respects perhaps more modern.

We need pause less on some others. Bishop Pearson (1612-86), though a longer liver than Barrow, was born much earlier, and his birth-date is reflected in the style of his famous treatise *On the Creed* and his other works. He was a Norfolk man, a son of Eton and of King's College, Cambridge, a Royalist chaplain (though he does not seem to have been much interfered with during the Commonwealth); and after the Restoration Master of Jesus, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, Master of Trinity, and Bishop of Chester. Richard Baxter, one of the lights of English Nonconformity, was a little younger than Pearson, and lived a little longer (1615-91). He was neither ill-born nor very ill-educated, but went to no University, and after some changes of mind, became a schoolmaster and took orders. His duty was chiefly at Kidderminster, with which town he was throughout his life most connected. He welcomed the Restoration, and might have had a bishopric, but scrupled, and "went out" in 1662, his recalcitrance to the law being, of course, followed by some inconveniences, but by nothing serious till the tyranny of James II. His *Saints' Rest* (1650), his *Call to the Unconverted* (1657), and the agreeable posthumous work published in 1696 as *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, are perhaps the most important for us out of a very large total of work. Baxter, who is said never to have altered or corrected his work, and whose style, though neither so vernacular nor so racy, has a certain approximation to Bunyan's, is a distinctly pleasant writer, if not very much more.

Baxter, Chillingworth, Hales, and others.

This rich period contains in theology, as in other departments, much that it would be interesting to comment upon. John Hales (1584-1656), the "ever memorable," was born at Bath and educated there and at Cambridge, but transferred himself to Oxford, where he became a Fellow of Merton and a lecturer in Greek. In 1619, or earlier, he was made a Fellow of Eton College, and lived there all the rest of his life, though he was deprived of his Fellowship after the King's death. He was one of Falkland's set in Oxfordshire and of Jonson's in London, and a mighty admirer of Shakespeare. His repute is rather greater than his works,[1] which consist of tracts, sermons, and letters from the Synod of Dort, where he went with Sir Dudley Carleton. His chief single work is the tract on *Schism and Schismatics*, 1636. It and the rest of his works contain arguments

[1] Ed. Dalrymple (Lord Hailes), 3 vols. Glasgow, 1765.

for toleration, and for a sort of orthodox freethinking, expressed in a rather undistinguished style. It is supposed to have been written against, or at least in reference to, the *Religion of Protestants* of William Chillingworth, who was born at Oxford in 1602, was much favoured by Laud, became Fellow of Trinity in 1628, see-sawed a good deal in religion, but after an experience of Romanism returned to the Church of England, was Royalist in the Rebellion, and died soon after the capture of Arundel Castle, where he was taken prisoner in 1644. The principal merit of his style (and in his days it was no common one) is its extreme clearness. George Herbert wrote some prose very like his verse. Archbishop Robert Leighton (1611-84) was born and educated at Edinburgh, where he was Principal and Divinity Professor in the University; later travelled a good deal; became Bishop of Dunblane in 1661 and Archbishop of Glasgow in 1669; resigned and died at Horsted Keynes in 1684. His character, in a position likely to attract slander, excited universal admiration; his style (shown chiefly in *Commentaries* on the Scriptures, which had an immense influence on Coleridge) has been highly, though not always clearly, praised. It belongs to the class of the great imaginative styles of his time. Bishop Wilkins (1614-72), a man with a rather questionable record, who married Oliver's sister and contrived to make the best of both sides in the struggle between King and Parliament, and of both Universities, being Warden of Wadham at Oxford and Master of Trinity at Cambridge, was an early student of physical science, and member of the Royal Society. His works, *Discovery of a New World*, *Discourse concerning a New Planet*, *Mathematical Magic*, and *Essay towards a Philosophical* (*i.e.* universal) *Language*, display in their very titles the survival of the fantastic. His style is simple and lively enough.

Lastly, the famous school of metaphysical theologians, called the Cambridge Platonists, produced in Henry More, the poet, and still more in Ralph Cudworth, the author of the *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), notable prose-writers. Cudworth, born 1617, in Somerset, entered Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1630, and becoming successively Master of Clare, Professor of Hebrew, and Master of Christ's, died 1688. Besides his great book, which is a sort of history of philosophy as well as a contribution to it, Cudworth wrote a treatise on *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, and other things. Though he has nothing like the vigour and distinction of his enemy, Hobbes, as a prose-writer, Cudworth stands high among our early philosophers for his style, which, if not exactly elegant and never splendid, is solid and clear.

CHAPTER V

MISCELLANEOUS PROSE

Milton's prose—Its faults and beauties—Sir Thomas Browne—*Religio Medici*—*Vulgar Errors*—*Urn Burial*—*The Garden of Cyrus*—Clarendon—Hobbes—Fellthain—Howell—Walton.

THE eminence of this remarkable period is certainly not least shown in the department of miscellaneous prose. After dealing with the theologians, we have still left the prose work of Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, Hobbes, and Clarendon, together with not a few minor prose writers of quality from Walton downwards. Milton's prose work, as has been already said, was in the main, though not quite wholly, comprised in the twenty years of his middle age, and is again mainly, though not quite wholly, controversial in character. The great bulk of it is an instance of the unwisdom of objecting to the distinction of matter and manner in literary history. If we look at the matter, it requires almost desperate partisanship to put much of Milton's prose work high. Except the *Areopagitica* and the *Letter on Education*, almost all of it is more than questionable. The divorce tracts are dubious from the point of view of public morality, and ludicrously one-sided as expressions of private spleen. The rudeness, the sheer ill-manners of the political and ecclesiastical pamphlets are allowed by all except those who decline to see any fault in the author of *Paradise Lost*. Even as a controversialist, all questions of taste and literary courtesy put aside, Milton is too one-sided, too passionate, and too weak in mere argumentative power to receive high praise from impartial criticism.

Milton's prose.

But when we turn to the mere form of his prose the case is quite altered. It is true that even here praise cannot be indiscriminate, and that there have been some who, even on formal grounds, have denied to Milton very high rank as a prose-writer. But some trick of imperfect sympathy may in such cases be suspected. It is true that Milton is by no means a faultless writer; he is, indeed, a very faulty one. Nothing is more curious than to see how he, the great

architect of the paragraph and the sentence in verse, seems to be utterly ignorant of the laws of both in prose, or at least utterly incapable or careless of obeying those laws. On many, perhaps on most, occasions the gorgeous harmonic phrases, of which in prose as in verse he is a master, entirely fail to adjust themselves to any kind of symphonic arrangement. They clash and welter against each other, or suddenly quaver off into some cacophony or insignificance of close which destroys their effect and value. The pleas that Milton's writing was constantly not merely rhetorical, but *oratorical*, and that we must give it the license of heard matter, as well as that his blindness latterly made correction difficult, have a certain validity as excuses, but not as defence. And the first, at least, can be only partially admitted as fact. There are sentences of Milton's which, though ugly on the page, would be harmonious on the platform or in the pulpit, but there are others, and many of them, which would be ugly anywhere.

Its faults and beauties.

The fact evidently is that Milton, to whom prose was not, as verse was, his native organ of speech, suffered exceptionally from the three vices of the prose of his age—the tendency to an unduly laboured vocabulary, that to an unduly Latinised syntax, and that to enormously long sentences. For the two first there was in his case, as all fair critics have acknowledged, not merely the excuse that men of letters read more Latin than English, but the particular one that it was the custom, and latterly the business, of this man of letters to write more in Latin than in English. And it seems strange that any one should be capable of denying the splendour of Milton's prose at its best. The gorgeous evocations of vision, how "for us the Northern Ocean, even to the frozen Thule, was scattered with the proud shipwrecks of the Spanish Armada"; the thunder of single phrases, "the dateless and irrevoluble circle"; the famous comparison between the poet, with his garland and singing robes about him, and the same sitting in the cool element of prose; and the almost more famous one as to the wandering of his younger feet among those lofty fables and romances; the magnificent search for the Dead Truth in the *Areopagitica*,—other things, not much below these, are there to prove his quality. We could have had them from no one but Milton, for the best of them have a certain quality or inseparable accident of egotism, not to say arrogance, about them of which Shakespeare and Spenser and Shelley, and others of the greatest, could never have been capable, and which yet gives them the swell of their cadence and the thrill of their ring. So let us be thankful for even the egotism of Milton.

The humour which Milton so profoundly lacked, together with a certain detachment which (for his and our good, no doubt) he

lacked likewise, were both present in the next writer to be mentioned, the greatest prose-writer perhaps, when all things are taken together, in the whole range of English. Thomas Browne,[1] who became Sir Thomas in the last years of his life, was born in London on 19th October 1605. His father, who was in trade but of a good Cheshire extraction, died when Thomas was a child, and his mother married a certain Sir Thomas Dutton. The boy was sent to school at Winchester, and thence to Broadgates Hall, Oxford, which, before he left it, was turned into Pembroke College. He took his Master's degree in 1629, and then studied medicine at Leyden, graduating there as doctor. After some years of travel and of practice in different places, he settled in the year 1636 at Norwich, with which city he was connected for nearly fifty years, marrying a Norfolk lady a few years later, and passing bad, worse, and better times (as Fuller's classification has it) in inoffensive and unmolested prosperity. His knighthood took place in 1671, and his death in 1682. Besides letters and a few minor miscellanies, we have from him five capital works, very different from each other in size, but of pretty uniform excellence as literature — *Religio Medici*, written, it would appear, pretty early (about 1635), but not printed till 1642; *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, better known by its English title of *Vulgar Errors*, 1646; *Urn Burial* and the *Garden of Cyrus*, published together in 1658; and the posthumous *Christian Morals*, which was not printed till 1716, and was edited forty years later by the great light of his college in the next century, and its great Christian moralist, Samuel Johnson. Every one of these works, from the mere pamphlets which contain the third and fourth to the bulky treatise on *Errors*, is of the very first importance in English literature.

Sir Thomas Browne.

Religio Medici has perhaps been the general favourite, a position at least deserved by the fact that it contains the first-fruits of Browne's extraordinary style, that it is a sort of key to the others, and that it displays, as does no other book, the mental attitude of the older and better generation of the Jacobean and Caroline time. This attitude may be taken as resulting from the following conditions. An immense but what we may perhaps call a somewhat lopsided erudition—ancient writers and modern writers in Latin being insufficiently balanced by those in the modern tongues; science, in the modern sense, conspicuous, but as yet unorganised; a wide and deep, but by no

Religio Medici.

[1] Ed. Simon Wilkin, in 4 vols., reprinted (not quite completely) in three of Bohn's Library. *Religio Medici, Christian Morals, Urn Burial*, and the *Garden of Cyrus*, are accessible in two small volumes of the "Golden Treasury." A new complete edition has been begun (1905) by Mr. Charles Sayle.

means necessarily unorthodox, and scarcely at all scornful, scepticism; and a gorgeous setting glow of poetical fancy. The result was an inevitable melancholy in all the choicer souls, except those where "cheerfulness would break in," as with Fuller; or those who were furiously devoted to the strife of the time and otherwise wrapt up in themselves, as with Milton—inevitable, though this melancholy might be erudite and discursive, as in Burton; mystical and sensuous, as in Donne; hectically religious, as in Crashaw; meditatively so, as in Vaughan. In Browne it is, as melancholy, kept in the background. He has not merely, like Burton, his learning ever present, but a practical and busy art; religious as he is, he does not become absorbed in religion like Crashaw or Herbert or Vaughan; his blood is cooler, and his brain less trammelled with occult things than Donne's. And the result is the *Religio*, a confession of intelligent orthodoxy and logical supernaturalism couched in some of the most exquisite English ever written.

Vulgar Errors.

The great medley of the *Pseudodoxia* is more puzzling to modern ideas. Here Browne first discusses the general subject of delusion in a fashion singularly different from, though perhaps not less philosophical than, that which would suggest itself to most people. Now and then he takes the errors one by one, but the fact is that "errors" is not quite the right word. Pseudodoxy, as opposed to orthodoxy, consists in the assumption, as positive truths, of things unproved, in the explanation of undoubted phenomena by wrong causes, at least as much as in the belief in things certainly false. Very often he will not go beyond the position that the popular creed may be, with more reason, denied or affirmed; sometimes he has possible explainings away of difficult facts; and it will readily be anticipated that he very often advances hypotheses more difficult for modern science to admit than the facts he wishes to explain. He is himself, though profoundly sceptical, by no means obstinately incredulous; and if he cannot believe the magical qualities of gems, and must admit that "it hath much deceived the hopes of good fellows what is commonly expected of bitter almonds," he declares "that an unsavoury odour is gentilitious or natural unto the Jews, we cannot well conceive." Yet he is by no means prone, as his great editor and fellow-collegian was, to deny things simply because they are strange; and the result is that the *Pseudodoxia*, written in a delightful style, ranging through a vast multitude of sometimes absurd but almost always interesting legends, anecdotes, beliefs, and lighted throughout with Browne's own special candles—his mild intelligence and his unaggressive irony—is one of the most charming books existing or conceivable.

The little tractates called *Hydriotaphia* or *Urn Burial*, and *The Garden of Cyrus* contain, the first but some half-hundred, the other some hundred small pages; but between them they show the quintessence of Browne's thought, and the palmary examples of his style. The first is perhaps the chief instance of his melancholy, meditative, yet pious and not unhopeful mysticism, the second of his mysticism fantastic. *Hydriotaphia*, starting from the fact of the discovery of some sepulchral urns in Norfolk, considers first, in a sweeping yet punctilious generalisation, the various historic methods of sepulture, or rather disposal of the dead. Then it passes to the sepulchral antiquities of Britain, and thence to urns and their contents, with some considerations on the relative durability of different parts of the human body. A chapter on funeral ceremonials, beliefs in immortality or annihilation and the like follows, and leads up to the ever-memorable finale, beginning, "Now since these dead bones," which has rung in the ears of some eight generations as the very and unsurpassable Dead March of English Prose. Every word of this chapter is memorable, and almost every word abides in the memory by dint of Browne's marmoreal phrase, his great and grave meaning, and the wonderful clangour and echo of his word-music. "Time, which antiquates antiquities," will have some difficulty in destroying this. And through all the chapter his style, like his theme, rises, till after a wonderful burst of mysticism, we are left with such a dying close as never had been heard in English before, "ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever, and as content with six foot as with the moles of Adrianus."

Urn Burial.

The Garden of Cyrus, a study on the conveniences and delights of the quincunx (⁘) is a curious and no doubt a designed contrast, exhibiting, though without any Fullerian merriment, the lighter side of that seventeenth-century quaintness, which disgusted and puzzled the eighteenth, and which, perhaps, the nineteenth has not for the most part genuinely sympathised with. We start gravely with the fact (or assertion) that Vulcan gave arrows unto Apollo and Diana, the fifth day after their nativities, and so pass to the Gardens of Antiquity (for Browne is as much a lover of gardens as his younger contemporaries Cowley and Evelyn themselves), and to the quincuncial arrangement of those of Cyrus according to Xenophon, with some remarks on the mysteries of decussation and its results, the various kinds of crosses. It is finally pointed out that in Paradise itself, the first garden, the Tree of Knowledge appropriately supplies a centre of this decussation. But the quincunx is far from limited to planting—architecture, crowns, beds, nets, tactics, and many

The Garden of Cyrus.

other things display it. It, or its number Five, is in the flowers in gypsum, in honey-combs, in the belly of the water-beetle, "though we found not what we expected in the cartilaginous parts of the weasand, and the discernable texture of the lungs of frogs." The excellence of planting in this form is returned to: rams' horns, by the way, will grow if planted at Goa. And lastly, with an apology, some other mysteries of Five are touched, till the whole ends again with another triumph of elaborate rhetorical art, "But the quincunx of Heaven runs low," etc.

It is not at all uninteresting or unimportant that the posthumous *Christian Morals*, though as characteristic of Browne's thought, style, and vocabulary as any of the others, has somewhat less finished splendour, and indeed ends with a sort of duplication of the finale of the *Urn Burial*. For this, it must be remembered, the author himself never published, and the fact shows (what indeed is certain from other evidence, both internal and external) that Sir Thomas was a very studious corrector of his own work. Nor could any one have improvised such miracles of execution in prose as the best things in the earlier books. Except in these respects, and in the somewhat more sober cast which its practical purpose imposes on it, the book is entirely of a piece with the others—the same gorgeously Latinised terminology, which somehow never becomes stiff or awkward; the same sententious weight, which is never heavy or dull; the same cunning construction of sentences and paragraphs; and above all, the same extraordinary power of transforming a commonplace into the eternal idea corresponding to it by some far-reaching image, some illustration quaintly erudite, or even by sheer and mere beauty of phrase and expression.

For this is the great merit of Browne, that, quaint or gorgeous, or even, as he sometimes may seem to be, merely tricksy—bringing out of the treasures of his wisdom and his wit and his learning things new and old, for the mere pleasure of showing them—thought and expression are always at one in him, just as they are in the great poets. The one is never below the other, and both are always worthy of the placid, partly sad, wholly conscious and intelligent, sense of the riddles of life which serves them as a background.

As if to justify Browne's own theory of the quincunx, there were at the same time with him, with Milton, and with Taylor, two other prose writers of the first class, though of different kinds, Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, and Thomas Hobbes. Hyde,[1] whose name and extraction came from Cheshire, though he was a Wiltshireman by

[1] Clarendon's works were presented by his heirs to the University of Oxford, and have always been issued by the University Press, which bears his name.

birth, was born in 1608, was educated at Oxford (Magdalen Hall), and then practised law. At first a younger son, he came into the property by the death of his brothers. His early Opposition attitude in the struggle between the King and the Parliament was, like that of other good lawyers, chiefly dictated by dislike of the few or false precedents adduced for some actions of the Crown. He was also a very strong Anglican, and irreconcilably opposed to Presbyterianism, and from 1641 onward he was the King's chief ostensible adviser, though unluckily his influence was more apparent than real. He followed first the King and then the Prince of Wales, becoming later chief minister to Charles II. in his exile and poverty, as well as father-in-law to the future James II. At the Restoration he still remained Charles's Prime Minister, but he became, partly no doubt by his own fault, unpopular, and being left in the lurch by the King, was impeached, and quitted England in 1667. He lived at Montpellier and Rouen for seven years longer, and died at the Norman capital in 1674. Nothing of his was published till the eighteenth century, but he had written much, beginning his famous history, in the narrow room of Scilly, as early as 1646. Later he wrote his own *Life*, but for literature his importance consists in the *History of the Great Rebellion*, not published till 1704.

Clarendon.

Clarendon's personal character and his political action have, as was inevitable, been judged rather too much according to the judge's political sympathies, and this fashion of judgment has extended even to his literary merits. On these last, however, there should be no serious difference. His demerits are sufficiently obvious—they consist first in an awkward syntax, secondly, and still more, in the most extraordinary sentences, piled up to appalling bulk by additions, parentheses, and a complete contempt of the humble art of punctuation. His merits, on the other hand, are, as regards the general scheme of his book, what has justly been called an epical composition—a sense of the central story and its unfolding; and in regard to individual passages, a singular accomplishment and skill. Few historians, prolix as he seems to be, can describe a given event—a battle, a debate or what not—with more vividness than Clarendon. But not one in all the long list of the great practitioners of the art has such skill at the personal Character. This character, it has been already observed, was a favourite exercise of the time, both in France and in England; but Clarendon's are far the greatest. He is accused of partisanship by partisans, but this would matter little, even if the accusation were just. For what we want to see is how Clarendon can draw us the portrait he wanted to paint. Its justice concerns history: literature is only busied with its art.

Thomas Hobbes was twenty years older than Clarendon. He

came from the same county (where, at Malmesbury, he was born on 5th April 1588) and went to the same college. When quite a young man he became attached, as tutor, to the family of Cavendish, and remained a friend, and for the most part an inmate, of that family for almost the whole residue of his long life. He was acquainted with Bacon, and, it would seem, with most of the literary men of the capital in the days of James and Charles, but published nothing himself till 1628, and then only a translation—though a very remarkable one—of Thucydides. He was much abroad, sometimes in charge of pupils, but published nothing of his own till 1642, when *De Cive* appeared. The more famous *Leviathan* did not appear till nine years later, in its author's grand climacteric. Hobbes was pensioned at the Restoration, but still lived chiefly with the Devonshire family, and died at their seat of Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire on 4th December 1679, having come well within a decade of seeing both the Armada and the Revolution. His work[1] is extensive, and much of it exists in duplicate, for Hobbes followed Bacon's plan of issuing his work both in Latin and English. His eccentric fancy of trying to translate Homer into verse, with an excessively wooden result, is of no importance for literature, nor are his generally mistaken mathematical works. But his books on political and other philosophy are the first things on the subject in English which unite very original thought with a masterly and individual style. The extreme nominalism of their metaphysics, the absolutism of their politics, and the rather inferential than declared freethought of their religion, do not concern us here, though all had a great effect on English philosophy, and through it, by way of answers, deductions, and the like, on English literature.

Hobbes.

Hobbes, however, might have been much less remarkable in these points, and yet have held a very important place in the history of literature itself. His style stands very much alone, and with the usual allowance for personal idiosyncrasy, seems to have been formed by two main influences. The first of these was his practice in translating Thucydides, whom he has followed, in the brevity and pregnant compression of his manner, without imitating the Thucydidean license of syntax. The second may be connected with his own philosophical doctrines, which made him regard words as things of stable and rigid signification, to be kept strictly to certain concrete meanings, and handled with the same absence of vagueness as if they were figures or coins. If there is any style before him to which his bears special resemblance, it is that of Ben Jonson, while there are also, and naturally, a few resemblances to Bacon. As a

[1] Ed. Molesworth, 16 vols. London, 1839-45. The English works fill ten of these, with an eleventh for index.

whole, though devoid of ornament to a degree which may sometimes seem almost repulsive, it is one of admirable vigour, clearness, and adaptability, especially for argumentative purposes. It shows at once most popularly, and not to least technical advantage, in the wonderful little treatise on *Human Nature*.

At least five other prose writers of this period must receive a short detailed notice—Felltham, Howell, Walton, Harrington, and Lord Herbert of Cherbury.

Felltham.

Of Owen Felltham (*c.* 1600–*c.* 1680), once more, "little or nothing is known." He was a Suffolk man, and wrote several things in prose and verse, but his fame rests entirely on his *Resolves*.[1] Although this book was so popular that a ninth edition at least appeared during the author's lifetime, and an eleventh in 1708, after which it went out of fashion for a century, we do not know exactly when the first edition appeared. The second is dated 1628. It is, in fact, a book of Essays, showing the extremely strong *nisus* of the time towards that form. There are a hundred and eighty-five of them, in subjects and general treatment somewhat resembling Bacon's, though far less magniloquent. Yet Felltham wrote well, thought wisely, and sometimes gives curiously fresh traits and touches of his time in manner as well as thought. His verses in the metaphysical kind are more curious than poetical, his observations on the Low Countries shrewd enough, and some letters agreeable.

Howell.

Felltham's letters, however, are few, and by no means the most noteworthy part of his work; those of James Howell[2] hold one of the principal places in English epistolary literature, and being themselves considerable in bulk, have survived, almost alone, from a much larger body of compositions by their author. He was born at Abernant in Carmarthenshire about 1594, was educated at Hereford School and Jesus College, Oxford, and showing aptitude for business, had various commissions abroad of a commercial nature at Venice (to import glass-workers), in Spain (to recover debts due in England), etc. At home he was one of Ben Jonson's "sons," and had numerous patrons through whom he obtained divers employments, ending in the important one of Clerk of the Council. This, however, was just before the outbreak of the Rebellion, and Howell reaped from it chiefly imprisonment. He became Historiographer Royal at the Restoration, and died in 1666. His *Letters*, which

[1] Reprinted early in the nineteenth century by Cummings (London, 1820), but in a somewhat garbled form. The contemporary editions are preferable.

[2] Contemporary copies also numerous; indeed editions continued to be multiplied till well into the eighteenth century. Mr. Jacobs has edited a handsome reissue (2 vols. London, 1890).

alone need concern us here, extend over a very long period, and in some cases certainly, in many probably, are not so much genuine letters as Essays thrown into epistolary form. At other times, however, and specially in those dealing with his foreign travels, there is no reason to suspect their trustworthiness, and the medley of their subjects, dealt with in a gossiping style, but by no means without knowledge, and with a curious profusion of details of the most various kind, has always been found agreeable by good judges.

We still rise in the scale of general acceptance as we come to Izaak Walton,[1] one of the most popular, and justly popular, of English writers. He was born at Stafford in August 1593, but became a Londoner, and carried on the trade of linen draper, "sempster," etc. His first wife was a great-grand-niece of Cranmer, and his second a half-sister of Ken, connections not more causing, than springing from, his intimate and deep affection and loyalty to the Church of England. He was the friend of Donne, of Bishops Morley, Sanderson, and King, and of Sir Henry Wotton, lived latterly at Winchester, where his son-in-law Dr. Hawkins was prebendary, and died there in 1683. He lives in literature by his *Complete Angler*, the first edition of which—it was afterwards much altered and supplemented by Cotton—appeared in 1653, in the depth of Fuller's "worse times," and by five short but admirable biographies of Donne, Wotton, Hooker, Herbert, and Sanderson. It is impossible to overpraise Walton's books, which are among the most unique and agreeable possessions of English literature, but it is possible to mispraise them, and this has often been done. It is questionable whether he had any literary art; his charm is exactly that of the conversation of one of the rare children who from time to time concentrate the charms of childhood. As he happened to live in the greatest of our literary ages; as he had no vanity, no bad taste, great friends, and the luck to set out what he thought about them, and about his favourite pastime quite simply, he is admirable and delectable, and stands by himself.

Walton.

The brother of one of his heroes, Lord Herbert of Cherbury,[2] is as pretty and complete a contrast to Walton as can well be imagined. In Walton, for all his infantile grace, there is not a touch of the coxcomb. Lord Herbert is coxcombry personified. He was born early enough (1583) to take a strong cast of the Elizabethan character, but he displays only its foibles, or some of them. His poems, which are not numerous, display a tone which, though never religious and not always moral, is still that of his brother transposed; their chief

[1] Editions innumerable.

[2] *Autobiography*, ed. S. L. Lee, London, 1886; *Poems*, ed. J. C. Collins, London, 1881.

interest is the occurrence in them of the *In Memoriam* metre, with not a few instances of its well-known cadence, and of the mould of phrase and thought which, like the Spenserian, it imposes almost automatically on poets. He wrote in Latin *De Veritate*, *Religio Laici*, and other things which have the not covetable honour of having founded English Deism, and are, at any rate, expressions of the scepticism which in nobler contemporaries produced magnificent work. His English productions are a *History of Henry VIII.*, printed the year after his death, which occurred in 1648, and his very astonishing and rather popular *Autobiography*, which did not appear till Horace Walpole printed it in 1764. Herbert behaved very badly in the Rebellion, and his own accounts of his personal prowess earlier are uncorroborated by external evidence; but he is not inconsiderable as a man of letters. If Shakespeare knew him, which is quite possible, it is a thousand pities that he did not put him into a play. The counterfeit would have had, and deserved, all the literary graces of Adriano de Armado and of Polonius in his speeches; in his actions he might have supplied a dignified pendant to Parolles.

James Harrington,[1] a much more agreeable person, and a better though quainter writer, may fitly close this chapter. He was the son of a knight in the county of Rutland. He was born in 1611, and was a member of Trinity College, Oxford, came early into a fair fortune, and enjoyed the advantages of travel and court attendance. Though of republican principles, he sympathetically attended Charles I. in his captivity, and was with the King to the "memorable scene" itself. During the interregnum (1656) he wrote *Oceana*. At the Restoration he was imprisoned, but released, and lived till 1677.

Harrington was undoubtedly mad at certain times, and perhaps not quite sane at any. But his imaginary Commonwealth, *Oceana*,[2] makes the subject of a very delightful though excessively odd book, wherein the project for a doctrinaire republic is worked out with all the learning, all the quaintness, and almost all the splendour of these mid-seventeenth-century writers, and with a profusion of fancy that never comes very far short of expression suitable to it. His other works are mostly unimportant.

[1] Not to be confounded with the earlier Sir John Har(r)ington (1561-1612), godson of Queen Elizabeth, translator of Ariosto, and author of some serious literature, and some curiosities thereof.

[2] Ed. H. Morley, London, 1887.

CHAPTER VI

SCOTS POETRY AND PROSE

Reformation verse—Alexander Scott—Montgomerie—Sir Robert Ayton—The Earl of Stirling—Drummond—Prose—*The Complaint of Scotland*—Knox and Buchanan—King James—Sir Thomas Urquhart.

WHEN we last handled the special Scottish division of English literature, it was up to the death of Sir David Lyndsay, and not long before the birth of James VI. and I. James had not been long dead, his son was but just executed, when definitely Scots literature came to an end altogether, or was continued, in poetry and *belles lettres* at least, only by a few stragglers like the Sempills of Beltrees,[1] to the time when the older part of it was revived as a curiosity by Watson and Allan Ramsay, and inspired some fresh attempts. To endeavour to account for this is not necessary; indeed, all such accounts must be mainly guesswork. It is enough to say that, as in the other case of the dying out of Anglo-Saxon, the most obvious explanation is by no means the safest or most probable. As there would probably have been little more Anglo-Saxon literature if there had been no Conqueror in 1066, so there would probably have been little Scots literature had there been no Union of Crowns in 1603. Both languages were ceasing to be equal to the literary demands on them, and both ceased to produce literature.

Reformation verse.

The Reformation struggle itself contributed a little to Scottish verse, but it cannot be said to have contributed much to Scottish poetry. The famous *Gude and Godlie Ballates*[2]—perhaps due to the Vedderburnes or Wedderburns—and the miscellanies mostly attributed to Robert Sempill (not one of the Beltrees family), which have been collected as *Satirical Poems of the Reformation*,[3] are very rarely of poetical value. Hardly

[1] See their *Poems*, ed. Paterson, Edinburgh, 1849. There is, however, some guesswork about the attributions.

[2] Ed. Mitchell, S.T.S., Edinburgh, 1897.

[3] Ed. Cranstoun, S.T.S., 2 vols. Edinburgh, 1891.

anything in the former repeats the vigour and "go" of the celebrated "Hey, trix! trim go trix!" which Sir Walter, as far as he could, inserted in *The Abbot*. The other "Gude and Godlie" pieces are either pious but not specially poetical, or else smirched with the savage moroseness which is the disgrace of the Protestant party. This appears to a far worse degree in the "Satirical" poems. Some of these, which have very little to do with the Reformation, are simply ballads, rather ribald but not unamusing, yet hardly ever poetical. Still, we may congratulate ourselves that the authors wrote them rather than such serious and decorous work as that of John Rolland,[1] who is the chief named poet between Lyndsay and Scott.[2] Rolland, of whom very little is known, but who seems to have been a Dalkeith man, composed two poems of some length, both on merely mediæval and, or at latest, fifteenth-century subjects, and in styles to match—*The Seuin Sages* and *The Court of Venus*. It is perhaps enough to say that in the latter he very nearly clears away the shame of England when Lydgate and Occleve are compared with Henryson and Dunbar. He certainly provides the very dullest and most prosaic poetry, if not exactly the worst verse, of the entire school, whether northern or southern.

The latest poets of distinction in the older Scots were, however, found, a little after these, in Alexander Scott and Alexander Montgomerie. Here also we cannot but be struck by the extreme antiquity of their forms as compared with those of their English contemporaries. Scott, who was in all probability still writing when Spenser began, is almost indistinguishable except philologically, if even so, from Dunbar; *The Cherry and the Slae*, Montgomerie's great work, is in the exact allegorical tone of the fifteenth and even of the fourteenth century, though its author does not seem to have died much before Shakespeare.

Scott, however, redeems the poetical fame of the reign of Queen Mary. We know really nothing about him. We can even date only two of his poems,[3] the *Lament of the Master of Erskine*, who was killed at Pinkie, and the *Welcome to Queen Mary* in 1562. He seems to have been unlucky in his married life, and if he is the "old Scott" to whom Montgomery refers, he was apparently no more successful than most poets in acquiring a fortune. But all this, except the dates, comes to really nothing. From him, or attributed to him, we have

Alexander Scott.

[1] *Seuin Sages*, Bannatyne Club, 1837; *Court of Venus*, ed. Gregor, S.T.S., Edinburgh, 1884.

[2] *The Court of Venus*, not printed till 1575, seems to have been written before 1560.

[3] Ed. Cranstoun, S.T.S., Edinburgh, 1896.

just three dozen pieces, none of them long. Most are love-poems, the rest complimentary, satirical, or occasional in one way or another, with one or two sacred —in fact the usual farrago of the poets of his time. Scott has no one favourite metre ; he will write in octaves with abundance of "aureate" terms—"genetrice," "celsitude," and the like —as in the address to Queen Mary ; in the popular *Christ's Kirk on the Green* metre, as in the "jousting and debate between Adamson and Sym" ; and in many other metres, mostly lyrical, and all managed with skill. He is not free from the excessive coarseness in phraseology which has already been noted, and, unlike Lyndsay, he does not accompany looseness of speech with any great preciseness in moral teaching. But he is a really agreeable poet of love in his way, playful, musical, and in the poem which bears the epigraph, "When his Wife Left him," really pathetic, with a not unmanly revulsion later to the indignant resolve to "choose ane other and forget her," instead of continuing "to break mine heart and not the better," the last phrase forming, with slight changes, the refrain of the poem.

Alexander Montgomerie[1] is a much more tangible person, and a rather more considerable poet than Scott ; yet even about him our personal information is by no means abundant. He is said to have been born at Hazelhead Castle in Ayrshire, not later than 1550, and to have belonged to a junior branch of the Eglinton family. Another tradition identifies the scene of *The Cherry and the Slae* with the junction of the Tarff and the Dee just above Kirkcudbright. He was in the service of the Regent Morton, and then in the King's about 1578, being called "Captain," with exactly what right is not known. James received sonnets from him, and quotes him in his *Rewlis and Cautelis* (*vide post*), but it does not appear that he ever did much for him, except giving him 500 merks a year, chargeable on the Archbishopric of Glasgow. He mentions many persons, some known, some unknown, as his friends. He got into some not clearly defined trouble, was dismissed from court, and lost his pension, but had it restored or confirmed by legal process in 1588, and we know that he was dead in 1615.

Montgomerie.

His works consist of one long and (at least by name) tolerably well-known poem, *The Cherry and the Slae*, a "Flyting" of the old kind with Hume of Polwarth, seventy sonnets, about as many more short miscellaneous poems, mostly secular, about half a score devotional pieces, and not quite a score versions of psalms and canticles.

The Cherry and the Slae is allegorical, though there is not universal consent as to what the allegory is. It turns at any rate on the

[1] Edd. (S.T.S., Edinburgh) Cranstoun, 1887, and Stevenson, 1910.

contrast between the cherry growing aloft and afar, the sloe beneath and at hand, the cherry sweet and precious, the sloe bitter and despised. A high-born love and a lowly one, virtue and vice, have been suggested, to which one might obviously add success and failure, learning and an idle life, and a hundred other pairs. The metre is peculiar, and became extremely popular in Scotland, so that it is better known by imitations than in the original, and may possibly have been combined by Montgomerie himself, though, as we have seen, northern poets in the alliteration + metre-and-rhyme stage had been extremely curious in their complicated arrangements. It is a quatorzain made up of the common sixain of 886886, rhymed *aabaab*, then a quatrain, 8686, rhymed *cdcd*, and then another quatrain of sixes, rhymed *efgf* internally in the odd lines, and simply at the end in the even. Except that the complete separation of the rhymes of these three subdivisions rather interferes with the unity of the whole, it is a very artful and agreeable device. There are 114 such stanzas in the piece, making nearly 1600 lines, and Cupid, Hope, Experience, Reason, Will, Danger, and other old friends, from the days of the *Rose* downwards, take part in the conversation. But to modern readers the pleasant opening description (again the old *Rose* description, but agreeably varied), the more original picture of the cherry-crowned crag and the effort to scale it, some well-expressed saws of mother wit, and a fine final stanza of praise, supply its attractions. The *Flyting*, alliterative, and of course foul-mouthed, is merely a curiosity. The sonnets, though not without a certain stiffness which we find in all the early attempts at that form in our language, have stateliness and even positive beauty, especially those to his mistress, who has been identified with his kinswoman, Lady Margaret Montgomerie. Many of his miscellaneous poems are to the same or other loves, though we have among them a burlesque *Navigation*, and some strictly miscellaneous matter. It is perhaps on these that Montgomerie's claims may be most surely based, for he shows in them more variety, as well as more strength, than Scott does. There is a quite fresh note in a piece which begins on an old string—

> Hay ! now the day dawis.

The transition is curiously sharp to Sir Robert Ayton, who was more than a child at the probable date of the death of Scott, and a man far advanced in middle life before that of Montgomerie. He was a cadet of the family of Ayton of Kinaldie in Fife, and took his degree (having been born in 1570) at St. Andrews in 1588. He travelled, but after the accession of James to the English throne came to court, was knighted, and

Sir Robert Ayton.

became private secretary to Anne of Denmark, a position which he afterwards filled in the household of Henrietta Maria. He had diplomatic employments abroad, and at home was familiar with all the English wits from Ben Jonson downward. He died in 1638, and is buried in Westminster Abbey. He wrote in a good many languages, but the important thing for us is that his English poems do not affect the slightest Scots dialect. The most famous of them is the universally known

I do confess thou'rt smooth and fair ;

while he has claims, inferior to those of Sempill, on the authorship of the original of *Auld Lang Syne*.

The tendency which Ayton[1] thus shows to abandon the Scots altogether—a tendency which may be partly accounted for by the wish to get rid of the associated traditions of alliteration and allegory, partly by the temptations of a wider audience in Southern English—is shown much more strikingly, and in greater bulk and variety of illustration, by two poets who are usually linked, William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, and William Drummond of Hawthornden, to whom the great Marquis of Montrose may be added.

The first named[2] was born at Menstrie, near Alloa, at a date not precisely ascertained—it used to be put at about 1580, but some hold that to be about a dozen years too late. He was well educated, and travelled with the seventh Earl of Argyll, to whose house his family seems to have been for some time attached. And he published most of his work, the sonnets called *Aurora* and the curious *Monarchical Tragedies* of *Croesus*, *Darius*, *Alexander*, and *Julius Caesar*, so early that they were all done by 1607. He was knighted, became a member of the household first of Prince Henry and then of Prince Charles, had employment in Scotland, and in 1614 began a poem on *Doomsday*, which he afterwards continued on a scale suitable to the subject. In 1621 he was grantee of the whole of Nova Scotia, in 1626 Secretary for Scotland, and in 1630 was raised to the peerage as Viscount Stirling, the earldom being afterwards bestowed upon him. He died in London in 1640.

The Earl of Stirling.

Lord Stirling is a distinct Elizabethan. His strange monarchic tragedies were probably suggested by Fulke Greville, and their choruses and dedications contain much stately work. The *Exhortation to Prince Henry*, which some have called his best thing, belongs to the same class as much of the work of Drayton, Daniel, and Chapman, from which *Doomsday* and the less portentous *Jonathan*

[1] Ed. Rogers, London, 1871.

[2] Part in Chalmers : complete, 3 vols. Glasgow, 1870.

are also not far. The *Aurora* collection of sonnets, songs, sestines, elegies, etc., in the same way resembles many pieces of the lyric yield of the last decade of the sixteenth century, and was but a few years later in publication (1604). The unfortunate thing for the poet is that he comes extremely late, and that his by no means inconsiderable beauties are scattered over such an enormous mass of work as to be discerned and enjoyed only by an effort even more considerable.

In this as in other respects Drummond of Hawthornden[1] had the advantage over his friend. He was born at the much-visited and beautiful seat of his family on 13th December 1585, was educated at the High School and University of Edinburgh, studied also in France, and succeeded his father in 1610. He lived for forty years after this, chiefly at his own home, marrying twice, but losing his first wife after a year, and remaining eighteen years a widower; entertaining Ben Jonson (*v. supra*), enjoying the friendship of most distinguished persons in Scotland and many in England. His death in 1649 is said to have been hastened by grief for Charles I., but he had submitted (unwillingly, it is true) to the Covenant. His notes of Ben Jonson's conversations have brought some obloquy on him, but the defence that he himself seems never to have intended them for publication has validity, and at the worst they are rather indiscreet than malevolent. Drummond was a very considerable man of letters, and perhaps the best known Scottish poet between Dunbar and Burns. He began with elegiac verses on Prince Henry in 1613, and altogether left a good deal, the chief items being *Forth Feasting*, a complimentary address to James in 1617 on his return to Scotland; an amusing but not quite certainly genuine macaronic poem called *Polemo-Middinia;* a prose tract entitled the *Cypress Grove*, which is a fine piece of musical and melancholy Jacobean prose; and a great number of miscellaneous poems, sacred and profane, sonnets, madrigals, and epigrams, translations, elegies, hymns; and, in short, all the miscellanea of the Caroline muse. Drummond.

The extreme beauty occasionally recognisable in Drummond's verse is marred first by a certain tone of the literary exercise, by a suggestion, at least as strong as in the case of his friend Alexander, that he would not have written if he had not had the great body of Elizabethan and other poetry before him; and secondly (though, indeed, this is only the same fault in another form) by a distinct deficiency in spontaneity, ease, and flow. Yet he is a very charming poet, especially in his madrigals and some of his sonnets, possessed of an elaborate courtly grace that does not exclude passion,

[1] Also not quite completely in Chalmers. Separately by Cunningham and Turnbull, and in the "Muses' Library." Life by Professor Masson, 1873.

and though never reaching the consummate expression of the best of his English contemporaries, yet very little behind them.

The verses which have made the special fame of Montrose are so few that they need but mention; so delightful that mention of them could not possibly be avoided. "Great, good, and just" and "He either fears his fate too much" have secured their place and are never likely to be put out of it. They are contained in a hundred anthologies; but may be best sought in Dr. Hannah's admirable collection of *Courtly Poets*,[1] which, beyond its special purpose, serves as a thesaurus of much occasional work of the best kind during the period covered by this and the two preceding Books, including the whole of the probable poetical work, strangely beautiful at times, of Sir Walter Raleigh, the graceful and interesting copies of verses which we owe to Wotton, and many pleasing things by Wyatt and Vaux, Oxford and Essex, Tichborne and Southwell, Dyer and Sandys.

We have previously considered the reasons of the lateness of Scottish poetry, and incidentally those of the still greater lateness of Scottish prose. But no reasons, however reasonable, will ever entirely remove surprise that *The Complaint of Scotland* (1549), which dates from the very eve of the middle of the sixteenth century, should be up to the present time, and should have every chance of continuing to be, the earliest known original[2] work of any importance in the kind, while even this is in very large part not original at all. Moreover, its style is as antique as its date is belated. It is not merely that the "aureate" term, the *rhétoriqueur* language, of the fifteenth century pervades and saturates it, but that the general scheme is scarcely more modern than—is scarcely so modern as—that of Chaucer's *Boethius*, more than a century and a half earlier. This curious mixture of archaism and pedantry continued to distinguish Scots prose until it ceased, as a characteristic and national language, to be written; and as Professor Ker has well observed on this very subject, we see it at least as late as Sir Thomas Urquhart, who has it supremely. The *Complaint* itself, in substance and scheme a violent diatribe against England (not surprising, inasmuch as it was written just after Pinkie), is treated like a prose *Romance of the Rose* so far as the tendency of the author to digress, divagate, and make excursions in every possible direction is con-

Prose.

The Complaint of Scotland.

[1] In the "Aldine Poets," London; constantly reprinted.

[2] There had been, of course, translations, but even these are not very early. Bellenden, in the early sixteenth century, was the first important and considerable translator into Scots. The standard edition of the *Complaint* is that of Dr. Murray, E.E.T.S., 1872-73. It includes some slightly earlier tracts. John Gau's *Right Way to the Kingdom of Heaven* (ed. Mitchell, S.T.S., Edinburgh, 1887) was translated and adapted from the Danish as early as 1533.

cerned. The book (now known to be largely from the French) is not solely a literary curiosity, but it is very mainly so.

The *Complaint* is anonymous,[1] and therefore borrows no interest from known or supposed authorship. The same cannot, perhaps, quite be said of the English writings of the two most famous of the author's countrymen and contemporaries, John Knox and George Buchanan.[2] The piquant title of the former's principal early work, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, 1558, is the best part of it; the *History of the Reformation* has something of the quaintness but little of the attraction of its time; his tracts and letters have small literary interest. In fact, Knox was only in a very minor degree a man of letters at all. He was simply an ecclesiastical politician, using the press, which had become already one of the most powerful of political engines. His English writing is clear, vigorous, and not incorrect; but it aims at nothing more.

Knox and Buchanan.

Buchanan, on the contrary, was a man of letters first of all, though he made a figure in politics. But his literary work was, in its greatest and by far its best part, written in a dead language. As we have seen, his own country, for forty years and more after he was born in 1506, had little or no prose literature, and her poetry was dropping off. He himself was more a Frenchman than a Scot by domicile for the greater part of his life, seeing that, from the time when as a young man he left St. Andrews till long past his fiftieth year, he, save for one short interval, was resident in France. His occupation was mainly pedagogic. Montaigne was under him at Bordeaux, and he wrote Latin plays and poems of real, though, even when every allowance is made, rather exaggerated, merit. His work in the vernacular is very small, and consists of political pamphlets, the chief of which is the savage but ingenious *Chamaeleon*, directed with a certain amount of reason against Maitland of Lethington. Buchanan is less "aureate" than the author of the *Complaint*, a little more florid than Knox, and on the whole, as indeed we should expect, holds the position of something like a Scottish Ascham in style, though with a stiffness and tendency to pedantry which may justly be charged, not merely upon his own more pedantic temperament, but on the infinitely less advanced condition of Scots as a literary language when compared with English.

The polemic temper and purpose of these men reflects itself in

[1] It has been attributed, like the *Gude and Godlie Ballates*, to the Dundee Wedderburns.

[2] Mr. Arber has given *The First Blast* in the "English Scholar's Library," London, 1878. The best edition of Knox's *Works* is that of Laing, 6 vols. Edinburgh, 1846, *sq.* The English *opuscula* of Buchanan have been edited by P. Hume Brown, S.T.S., Edinburgh, 1892.

most of their contemporaries and successors, and the wide spread of it may indeed be fairly charged in part with the sterility of Scots in literature proper. Ninian Winzet, the chief pamphleteer on the Roman side, is early, was a learned and ingenious writer, and contrasts very favourably with his opponent Knox in tone and temper; but still he is no great man of letters, nor are the Melvilles (Sir James, 1535-1607; Andrew, 1545-1622; James, 1556-1614), Spottiswoode, Baillie, and others later, such. They are interesting by their matter and by the racy quaintness which hardly failed any one then.

King James.

The *Reulis and Cautelis*[1] of King James have been already referred to, and are a not unimportant document in the history of English criticism; the *Counterblast to Tobacco*, the *Basilikon Doron*, and the *Demonology* are known, at least by their titles, to all, and there is a very large residue of chiefly theological work. But he is only a good plain writer, not equal to his own recorded powers in conversation, or those lent him by the greatest man of letters of the nation that he first ruled. Still, Scots prose was to produce one last delightful example, concentrating, heightening, embellishing, and preserving for ever all its own most racy characteristics, in Sir Thomas Urquhart,[2] Knight of Cromarty, and, in far other sense than most of us, a descendant in lineal and specified genealogy from Adam. He was born in 1605, took a strong part on the Royalist side, shared in the "Trot of Turriff," was knighted in 1641, fought at Worcester, and died just at the moment of the Restoration. His known work consists of a translation of Rabelais and of several most singular tractates on mathematics, linguistics, and what not, with wonderful Greek compound titles, and written in a language which is *Euphues* and Sir Thomas Browne rolled into one, and extra-illustrated by national and personal peculiarities. It is impossible to read Urquhart without conceiving a strong liking for the man and a great admiration for his literary powers; but it must be admitted that it was well he left no school.

Sir Thomas Urquhart.

[1] Ed. Arber, with Gascoigne's *Steel Glass*, etc. Not much else has been recently reprinted.

[2] There is, unluckily, no complete edition of Urquhart. The *Rabelais* has been often reprinted; the Maitland Club collected his quaint treatises, *Trissotetras*, *Logopandecteision*, etc.; but there is said to be other unprinted matter. In fuller space the historian Pitscottie, the collectors Maitland and Bannatyne (more precious to literature than many men of letters), Scot of Scotstarvet, Mure of Rowallan, Alexander Hume, and Robert Ker, Earl of Ancrum (known by one fine sonnet), could claim notice, and even here they claim mention.

INTERCHAPTER VII

THE present Interchapter must be so contrived as to pay a double debt, and to summarise not merely the Caroline sub-period but the entire literary age which is still, and justly, called Elizabethan by those who are not studious of innovation for innovation's sake.

In the first respect our recapitulation in the three kinds should have been made unusually easy by the chapters which have gone before. In all three the mark, if not of decadence—that is a dangerous word—yet of completion of phase, is very distinct. There is not a touch of it, save for the most unessential things, in Milton ; but then Milton is one of those examples which come, fortunately, from time to time, to prove the folly of any strict "evolution" theory in letters, and the superiority of a theory of revolution tempered by permanence. He dwells apart ; but the rest, whether poets, prose-writers, or dramatists, tell of the future as much by their excellences as by their shortcomings. For delight Caroline poetry, in the characteristic form of it, has few superiors ; but no one who keeps his critical head can say that its charms have not a touch of the morbid. They consist in extreme strangeness, in quintessenced and preternatural art, rather than in the direct and simple appeal in transcendence to nature. We would not lose them for anything ; but we feel that they are something of the kind of Ninon de Lenclos, their contemporary, who fascinated the grandsons of her first admirers. And then, side by side with them, there is the phenomenon, never known except in periods of eclipse, of a quite different school growing and flourishing. In these things there is no possibility of mistake. The fear or hope of change is hardly even perplexing, it is so clear.

The same signs present themselves in drama, but more unmistakably still, and with far less of compensation. Once more, we would not lose the best plays written after the accession of Charles I., but the loss would by no means be the occasion of such grief as we should feel if we had known and were suddenly, by some malignant power, forced to forget, except in vague recall of their charm, Herrick and Marvell, Crashaw and Carew. In this kind

the sudden flight compensates less ; and here—as not in poetry—we look in vain for any promise of a new style to take the place of that which is failing. Jonson and Chapman and Dekker belong to a far earlier time ; Massinger and Ford and Shirley, despite the ambition of the second and the industrious talent of the other two, leave us partly cold ; and there are no others that rise beyond a very moderate second class. Above all, the inability to raise any new form in drama, and the quite shocking laxity of the verse in which most of what is written shows itself, reconcile us to closing the chapter. When a man of undoubted talent like Davenant succumbs in this way there is clearly something wrong ; but when a man who is at least parcel-genius like Suckling, who can write other verse quite excellently, follows suit, then no further doubt is possible : it is time for this kind of drama to go.

The phenomena of prose are not entirely different, but show themselves in a different and much more satisfactory way. Here also we see that there is a necessity, if only a temporary necessity, for a change. Prose—"the instrument of the average purpose"—has got very ill fitted indeed for any such thing. It has become, save in the hands of Hobbes, nearly incapable of directness, of plain business-like treatment. The protest which, as we shall see, was made in the beginning of the new period by Sprat was justified absolutely so far as the mere business requirements of the matter went, and was not entirely without justification even from the point of view of *belles lettres*. A general theory of style which could allow even Milton constantly to spoil his sentence, and which could not shepherd even Clarendon from wandering inextricably into a *cul-de-sac* at every few pages, obviously required at least the provision of something alternative if not an utter reformation.

Yet here the actual condition of things provided condolences and vails of such magnificent quality that those are almost to be excused who would have had no reform at all. An English literature without Sir Thomas Browne is a thing so impoverished as to be appalling to think of, and the loss of Taylor and Milton in his prose, of Fuller and the not yet mentioned Glanville, and of not a few minors, would still be a hideous deprivation. Even these minors, and still more the eccentricities of the Urquhart type, have an engagingness which we look for in vain from Dryden to Southey ; while the great men of the time are simply unmatchable in any language. The close of the *Apology* itself is a very little, though only a very little, inferior to the close of the *Hydriotaphia*.

Nor must we forget that this incomparable descant is the *Ite missa est* of something more than Caroline prose or Caroline literature—it is that of the whole great Elizabethan period. That

period from beginning to end covered just eighty years—an ordinary lifetime; indeed, Hobbes was born less than ten years after its beginning and outlived its close by nearly twenty. Yet into this ordinary lifetime it had compressed the literary events of a dozen ordinary generations. It had found English literature with scarcely more than one name which could pretend to the first class, with very few of the second, with but a scanty battalion of distinguished known writers, with a body of work, anonymous and assigned, which in its more notable examples would fill but a very small book-case, with the list of styles and kinds either full of blanks or completed only by experiments and rough sketches, the great department of drama having nothing to show but these. It left a mighty library full of masterpieces, with the figures of Spenser and Shakespeare among dead, and those of Milton and Browne among living, men, showing as but the captains of scores and hundreds of poets and prose-writers and dramatists of almost every kind. Not one single department of literature except the prose novel was now in a rudimentary condition, and few languages were in this respect better off than our own. In not a single kind (save this and criticism) were we now unfurnished with champions whom we could oppose to the greatest of any literature, ancient or modern.

This vast overrunning of the literary territory, this tumultuous peopling of the literary solitudes, is, no doubt, the chief general phenomenon of the time, and its minor phenomena should have been almost sufficiently indicated in the divisional summaries and the text which supports them. In all departments we can indeed observe (taking care not to make the generalisations too strict) a character of more or less playful exuberance in the strictly Elizabethan part, of recollection and sober weighty thought in the Jacobean, and a further stage either of sheer extravagance, of melancholy mysticism, or of quintessenced, artificial, very slightly frivolous, grace in the Caroline; but these notes must not be forced. We can see the vast importance of the period in prosody, with Spenser reshaping, and to a great extent fixing its poetic diction and sound-value; with Shakespeare and the dramatists loosening and suppling versification to the utmost possible extent; and with Milton on one side and the early coupleteers on the other preventing it from becoming simply lawless. We see the Euphuist protest against want of colour in prose, at first merely fantastic and bizarre, losing little of its fantasy, but acquiring gravity, harmony, weight, in Jacobean hands, and at last giving us the unsurpassable majesty and sweetness at once of the great prose-writers of the middle of the century. The essay makes its appearance, and spreads itself subtly, and under all manner of disguises, in many directions. Lyric poetry of the true song-kind attains a

luxuriance and a charm never before and seldom since attained. The sermon becomes one not merely of the great instruments of religion, but of the great achievements of literature; the masque, a graceful if artificial and short-lived kind, comes into bloom. History and philosophy, cultivated sparingly before, receive consummate treatment at the hands of Hobbes and Clarendon. Above all, the drama, so long postponed, finds, in the course of a few years, expression in almost every possible variety, and, though it still has a sort of afterpiece or set of afterpieces to present in Restoration comedy and the heroic drama, runs nearly its full course.

If in such an abundance, such a riot almost, the principles of measure, of order, of limit, are not always sufficiently attended to, there can be little wonder. They could be, for a time at least, very willingly spared; they would almost certainly have deprived us of more than they could have given; and those who regard them with special affection will not find reason to complain of their too sparing presence for something like a hundred and fifty years, which now lie before us in the periods of the two following Books.

BOOK VIII

THE AUGUSTAN AGES

CHAPTER I

THE AGE OF DRYDEN—POETRY

The term "Augustan"—Its use here—Dryden—His life—His earlier poems—The satires, etc.—The *Fables*—His verse—Butler—Restoration lyric—Satires of Marvell and Oldham.

INDUSTRIOUS attempts have been made to trace the origin of the phrase *Augustan age* in reference to English literature. The phrase itself has not always been used with the same denotation, being sometimes applied to the whole period during which Pope wrote, sometimes limited to the reign of Queen Anne, and sometimes extended backwards so as to include Dryden. This last seems the best use if the term—which is a convenient one and not erroneous except by intention—be employed at all. For it connects itself well with Johnson's famous comparison of Dryden's dealings with the English language and literature to those of Augustus with the city of Rome, which he "found of brick and left of marble." We do not nowadays consider Shakespeare brick or Rowe marble; but that does not matter. The term "Augustan."

What is beyond controversy is that a change of the widest and deepest kind passed not merely over but through English literature, at a time corresponding almost exactly with the Restoration, and in consequence of influences of which for all but forty years Dryden was the supreme literary exponent—that the kind of literature then produced received its greatest polish, and came nearest to its own ideal, in some forty years more to the death of Pope—that for a further period of not quite sixty years it was in office, though it was gradually losing power—and that it was driven Its use here.

from both, after a preliminary summons to depart in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, by the triumph of Romanticism in the early years of the nineteenth century. The history of this literature will occupy us during this Book and the next, and the present may best be occupied with the Augustan period, in the wide sense, of Dryden, Pope, and their times.

The causes and necessity of the change have been indicated already; the course of it must occupy us here. Nor perhaps in any period is one single figure so prominent and exemplary as in the first part of this. Pope was nearly approached by others, and his greatness was in poetry alone, for he scarcely touched drama, and though a good prose-writer, was only such for pastime. But Dryden was the greatest poet of his own day and style by such a distance that no second can be placed to him. He was the chief agent in the shaping and in the popularising of the new prose. And if one or two tragedies of others have been thought, and several comedies certainly are, better than any play of his, yet no one did both so well, while he also exceeds all in the volume of his dramatic work and in the variety of its forms.

Dryden.

John Dryden[1] was born in 1631 at Aldwinkle All Saints in Northamptonshire, of a family which certainly came from the North, and perhaps from beyond the Border, but which had been settled for some time in its actual position with estates and a baronetcy. He was educated at Westminster, and at Trinity College, Cambridge. His connections on both sides were Puritan and Parliamentary, and his uncle on the mother's side, Sir Gilbert Pickering, was a close friend of the Protector, whose death Dryden celebrated in verse. But it is certain that he could never have been an anti-Royalist at heart; and when the Restoration came he celebrated that too with as much good-will as vigour. We know extremely little of his beginnings in literature; but in 1663, having succeeded to a small property, he married Lady Elizabeth Howard, eldest daughter of the Earl of Berkshire, and very soon afterwards was in active practice as a playwright. In 1670 he was made Poet-Laureate and Historiographer-Royal in succession, respectively, to Davenant and Howell, but for ten years more he wrote little but plays. The ferments of the Popish Plot induced his great political satires. He had a pension in addition to his salaries, and his enemies have held that interest decided his change of religion when James II. succeeded to the throne and began proselytising. This imputation is not only ungenerous but improbable. Dryden did

His life.

[1] The standard edition of Dryden is Scott's (18 vols.), which has been re-edited, with a few additions and corrections, by the present writer. Mr. Christie's "Globe" edition of the *Poems* is not likely soon to be superseded.

much poorly-paid work for the court, drudging at translations and writing *The Hind and the Panther* (the greatest poem ever written in the teeth of its subject), and when the Revolution came he was faithful to his cause, and lost everything but his small private fortune. He returned to play-writing, and after a time made inadequate but not inconsiderable gains by his translation of Virgil. His last and almost his best work was contained in the volume of *Fables*, which was published (1699-1700) very shortly before his death, from mortification of the toe due to gout, on 1st May 1700. He had three sons, the youngest of whom succeeded to the baronetcy. Dryden's change of faith, the questionable shape of a good deal of his dramatic writing, and other things, have caused controversy about his private character; but all the available evidence leaves him a very fair specimen of humanity, amiable in private life, extraordinarily modest and generous to others in literary matters, a hard worker, sturdy in resisting misfortune, frank in confessing his own faults, and chargeable with very few except the coarseness and the adulation which were characteristic, not of his own personality, but of the manners of the time.

His intellectual and his literary greatness have seldom been denied, though estimates of them have, of course, varied. He did not show his great powers very early, and indeed the amount of work that we have from him till after his thirtieth year is extremely small. As a boy he contributed to the already mentioned volume of funeral poems on his schoolfellow, Lord Hastings, a piece in the most extravagant "metaphysical" style, but not without cleverness; his *Heroic Stanzas* on Cromwell's death (again showing careful attention to the fashion of the time in their choice of the quatrain metre of *Gondibert*) are stiff and unequal but fine in parts, and already display a certain craftsmanship which is very rare in the work of a beginner.

The group of his poems on the Restoration—*Astraea Redux*, a poem on the *Coronation*, and one to Clarendon—is of singular interest. All three are written in the couplet, the metre that Dryden was born—not exactly to introduce, seeing that it had been introduced in its new form by Waller and others before he was born, but—to strengthen, to perfect, and to instal in public favour for something like a century and a half. He is not yet at his best in it, or at anything near his best. His touch is unsure; his sense is sometimes not quite clear; and he is often driven to clumsy inversions in order to get it expressed and concluded in the distich. But the inimitable ring which distinguishes his verse from all others—the ring as of a great bronze coin thrown down on marble—appears already, with something of the command of easy stately phrase and very much of the "energy divine" which was

His earlier poems.

justly attributed to him by his best pupil. In his next, and for many years only, important poem he relapsed into the quatrain. *Annus Mirabilis* (1666) is a poem which might be taken as a text or series of texts to show the difference between the old poetry and the new. The form is against it; the quatrain is meditative and impressionist, not historic. There are queer lapses into the metaphysical, oscillations between bombast and bathos, which had better not be there. And yet, as distinctly, though after a very different fashion, as in the almost contemporary *Paradise Lost* itself, there is the "wind of the spirit," the power of transforming, the evidence of command of that mysterious instrument, the measured word. It is a proof of the greatness of Dryden that he knew Milton for a poet; it is a proof of the smallness (and mighty as he was on some sides, on others he was very small) of Milton that (if he really did so) he denied poetry to Dryden.

Then, for fifteen years and more, Dryden did nothing of importance in pure poetry, and his drama—verse and other—will be handled two chapters hence. He broke out again with the marvellous group of satires above referred to—*Absalom and Achitophel* (Part I., November 1681), *The Medal* (March 1682), *MacFlecknoe* (October 1682), and the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel* (with important contributions from Dryden, though the whole is not his), a month later, with *Religio Laici* almost at the same moment. In these poems Dryden showed himself in a light which, though not perhaps surprising to careful students of his plays, could hardly have been anticipated by any one who knew his earlier poems only. In mere subject not one of the group is absolutely original—originality of the obvious kind is not Dryden's forte. But in the treatment, the form, the real essence of them, few things more original have ever been seen in English literature. His long practice in rhyming plays had given him an absolute command of the form of couplet, of which in the Restoration group his grasp had been uncertain, and a secure handling of the widest diversity of subjects in verse. Nobody—hardly even Lucretius—has ever argued in verse like Dryden; few have understood the *ordonnance* of a verse-narrative as he has. But over and above these gifts, Nature had endowed him with a still more special faculty for satiric and didactic verse—the faculty of keeping himself thoroughly *above* his subject in the sense of command. Dryden has been strangely called "phlegmatic," from the cool superiority which he observes in dealing with the most exciting themes. He is in reality no more phlegmatic than Shakespeare himself, though he is a lesser poet with lesser range. The phlegm of the great passage on Life in *Aurengzebe*, of the "wandering fires" in *The Hind and the Panther*, to mention no

The satires, etc.

others, is a very curious humour; and it were much to be wished that more poets would run such humours upon us. But Dryden was not lightly moved by light things; and while his adversaries howled and gnashed and gesticulated, he swam steadily above on an easy wing pouring molten iron upon them. The controversial verse of *Religio Laici*, with its tell-tale yearning for an infallible director, is less popular than the great satiric portraits of the *Absalom* pieces, *The Medal*, and *MacFlecknoe*, but it is not less good. Perhaps the very best of all—magnificent as are the "Zimri," the "Og," the "Doeg," and the whole of *MacFlecknoe*—is the "Shimei" (Slingsby Bethel) of the first *Absalom*. Nowhere else is the easy wing-stroke of the couplet, at once propelling the poet through upper air and slapping his victim in the face at every beat, so triumphantly and coolly manifested. These things belong, no doubt, to one of the outlying districts of poetry, but poetry they are.

The Hind and the Panther in strictness belongs to this series of poems, and despite the not altogether happy and, at the time, much-ridiculed adaptation of the beast-fable to the controversies of the day, and the extreme weakness of the central argument, it contains some of Dryden's very finest things—the magnificent *Confiteor* above referred to being perhaps the best of the set passages, and the description of the Panther (the Church of England)—who

> Had more of Lion in her than to fear—

the best perhaps of the single lines. But it was preceded and followed by much less happy compositions, on two of which the curse of Laureate verse lies something heavily—*Threnodia Augustalis*, a Pindaric on the death of Charles II., and *Britannia Rediviva*, a poem in couplets on the birth of the luckless Old Chevalier. Yet even in these the magical beauty of Dryden's verse appears.

For some ten years after the Revolution Dryden was too much occupied with hackwork of various kinds—the chief being the *Virgil*[1]—to produce much original, or even semi-original, poetry; but his genius happily inspired him, just before he died, to give the most striking proof ever given by any poet that age and ill-health and the unkindness of circumstance had not affected his absolute pre-eminence over all his fellows. The so-called *Fables* were chiefly made up of some remarkable paraphrases—Dryden himself, with more modesty, called them "translations"—from Chaucer

The *Fables*.

[1] He had begun the practice of translation, chiefly in a series of *Miscellanies* by himself and others, even before the great satires, and did, besides the *Virgil* (1697), much of Juvenal (1693) and a good deal of Ovid and Lucretius, with some Horace and Homer. It is very great work in its kind of loose translation-paraphrase: but one had so much rather have the originals!

and Boccaccio. But they also contained an exquisite dedication to the Duchess of Ormond, some lines of which are the very flower of Dryden's magnificent versification; a very fine address to his cousin, John Driden (the name had been very variously spelt, and the cousins retained different forms), whose still living sister Honor had been his own first love; *Alexander's Feast*, and other capital things. Macaulay, who, though politically and morally unjust to Dryden, retained the eighteenth-century admiration for his literary genius (which had been authenticated by the great Whig authority of Fox), has put the merits of the book with equal brevity, force, and truth in describing its verses as "such as no other living man could have written."

His verse.

We must define and emphasise this a little, for it is one of the most important points of this history. When Johnson, not in the *Life of Milton* but elsewhere, says that that poet ought not to be blamed for harshness, for he wrote as well as his time would allow, and would no doubt have written more smoothly if he had written after Dryden, too many people nowadays laugh with pity or derision, as the case may be. Johnson is indeed quite indefensible, not in preferring Dryden's verse to Milton's—for the things are incommensurable, and if a man cannot enjoy both and can enjoy one he takes the benefit of the statute *De Gustibus*—but as making a very gross historical error. Milton's versification is not of an older stamp than Dryden's; it might even plead that it is younger, seeing that while Dryden's verse is now obsolete, the other is still fresh. The two are not older or younger, reformed or unreformed, better or worse—they are *different;* they represent two independent developments of the same really earlier stage, the full-blown undisciplined blank verse of the middle and later dramatists, coming as it did on the heels of, or simultaneously with, the varied stanza metres of which the Spenserian is at once the great original and the unquestioned chief, and the loose enjambed couplet of which we find the last notable example in Chamberlayne. Milton, especially devoting himself to the good sides of these various lawlessnesses, created, to an extent not surpassed or sensibly enlarged to the present day, a form of blank verse at once infinitely various and extremely precise, capable, by the further elaboration of the verse-paragraph, of being made to subserve almost every purpose of poetry except the lyrical. Dryden, revolting from the bad sides, and following the school of Waller, rejected blank verse for a time even for dramatic purposes (though in this he recanted), rejected it almost entirely for non-dramatic purposes, and produced a form of the couplet which, if not the best vehicle conceivable for all kinds of poetry, was at any rate a splendid *carroccio* for invective, for argument, and for narrative. He

could do much else. His little-read lyrics in the plays, and a few out of them, have extraordinary variety, and sometimes come not far short of the earlier Caroline charm. His Pindarics (the best of which is the unequal, but in parts unequalled, *Ode to the Pious Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew*) have almost limitless majesty and no small grace. But his couplet—the couplet which he left to none, for Pope, not being able to follow, diverged—is undoubtedly his great title to fame.

For this, or for some other reason, it has been the fashion for a century to call him prosaic. "The most prosaic of our great poets," "a classic of our prose," and the like, are the judgments of critics who have not the excuse of the first revolters from his tradition. This is idle. If the best things in even the Restoration pieces and *Annus Mirabilis* and the *Conquest of Granada*, much more the *Aurengzebe* patch and the *Hind and Panther* act of humiliation, and the opening of *Religio Laici*, and the address to "The daughter of the Rose whose cheeks unite The differing titles of the Red and White," as well as a hundred hardly lesser things—the songs in *The Indian Emperor* and *Oedipus* and *Marriage à la Mode*, the singing flames in which Shadwell and Settle roast for ever—if these things be prose, why, then, we must really have a new dictionary, and poetry, hard enough to define as it is, will become more impossible of definition than ever. If there are not in these things the transformation and sublimation, by the use of metrical language, of ideas so that they remain for ever fitted to transport and inspire, then such transformation and sublimation are nowhere; they cannot, on anything but an unsafe criterion of will-worship and private judgment, be said to be in the *Tempest*, in *Comus*, in *Adonais*, in *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. The administration is different, but the spirit is the same.

We shall not use such language again in the present chapter. Dryden was not a prosaic poet, but he was the poet of a prosaic time. Nor perhaps does this appear anywhere more distinctly than in the work of Samuel Butler,[1] whose life was about the same length, since, though nearly twenty years older than Dryden, he died just twenty years before him. He was a native of Worcestershire, where he was born at Strensham in 1612. He was educated at the cathedral school of the diocese, but he went to no university. Although details about him, till his death in 1680, are not exactly scanty, they are not very informing, and are sometimes rather contradictory. During the greater part of his life he seems to have

Butler.

[1] *Poems*, ed. R. B. Johnson ("Aldine Poets"), 2 vols. London, 1893. A complete edition of prose (*v. sup.* p. 375, *note*) and verse has at last been undertaken for the "Cambridge Classics" by Mr. A. R. Waller.

filled quasi-official or ministerial positions in the households of divers public or private persons, and it was pretty certainly in one of these that he picked up the facts for *Hudibras*. After the publication and popularity of that great satire he seems to have been a disappointed man, but even tradition makes himself to blame. The first part of *Hudibras* was published in 1662, the second next year, the third not till fifteen years afterwards. He published little else in his lifetime, and the so-called "posthumous works" are certainly for the most part spurious. But nearly eighty years after his death, in 1759, Mr. Thyer, Chetham Librarian at Manchester, issued *Genuine Remains*, which have an authentic pedigree from Butler's friend Longuevile, and would authenticate themselves without any.

Butler, by some direct and fairly trustworthy evidence and a consensus of tradition, is said to have been of a saturnine and rather disobliging temperament, which indeed is pretty obvious in his work. But there is absolutely no reason to suppose that *Hudibras* is animated by personal spite at his hosts, masters, or companions during the Commonwealth. Every trait, though exaggerated for the particular purpose, is historically justified. It is clear that Butler, though by no means a very fervid pietist or "high-flying" Cavalier, was a convinced opponent of irregular "enthusiasm" in religion, and popular license in the State; and the whole piece is treated with a largeness of handling irreconcilable with the idea of a petty wiping off of private grudges. He was evidently a born satirist, whose satire was not, like Dryden's, merely one development of an almost universal faculty of literary craftsmanship; not, like Swift's later, a vain attempt to relieve the passionate melancholy and the "savage indignation" excited by the riddles of the painful earth. It was the offspring of a keen intelligence, a not too amiable temper, and one form of the hard, practical, business-like mood which was seizing the nation after its century of heroic flights. His minor poems, "The Elephant in the Moon," the piece to the Royal Society (then new, and much rallied by the wits), his "Claude Duval" ode, his delightful dialogue of Cat and Puss ridiculing the heroic plays, and many of the meditative scraps, are excellent; but for posterity he is the author of *Hudibras*.

This curious composition, in about ten thousand octosyllabic lines, takes its ostensible theme, the adventures and misadventures of Sir Hudibras and his man Ralpho, from *Don Quixote*, and some things in its manner from the great French prose satire of the end of the sixteenth century, the *Satyre Ménippée;* but in its real essence is quite original. The story, though some of its incidents and episodes are amusing, and have fixed themselves in the general memory, is of no importance: we can see that the author neither cared about it himself nor expected his readers to care. The

characters, though trouble was taken to identify them, are types and nothing more. But the whole is so constructed as to pour a steady shower of pitiless ridicule on the Parliamentary party, and as this exactly suited the taste of the nation, which was rejoicing in its freedom from the sometimes bloodthirsty and always teasing tyrants who had domineered over it, the popularity of the piece is readily enough understood, while its great human wisdom and concentrated, if not very exalted, power of thought have made it matter for more than a time. It is indeed of the class of work which, as has been said of something else, "invariably displeases fools," and sometimes men like Samuel Pepys, who are not to be so called. Its bitterness is too cutting for some tastes; its grotesque bewilders or disgusts feeble folk. Butler is, in fact, a true "metaphysical" in the way in which he produces, and heaps in the strangest juxtapositions, endless scraps of lore and quips of fancy; but there is more of the coming than of the passing time in the intense common sense which underlies, and (at no great height certainly) overarches, all his erudition and all his wit. His form too is of the most notable, and is a sort of companion species-by-itself to that of Skelton. The octosyllable, though capable of great melody, had always been a light and skipping form, but he taught it quite a new pace. There is nothing before that resembles, while everything of the kind that comes after imitates, the Hudibrastic couplet, now soberly plodding in designed doggerel to suit the sense, and now lifting itself into a sort of pirouette with one of the wonderful final rhymes which have impressed themselves more than anything else on the popular remembrance. The verse of Butler is scorn made metrical.

Among the few poets who must be mentioned here with Dryden, the group of belated and slightly degraded Caroline songsters holds the most important place. It consists of three "persons of quality," the Earl of Dorset, Lord Rochester, and Sir Charles Sedley, of one ancestress of the modern lady-journalist, Afra Behn, and of a vague and shifting body of men of letters, who sometimes were able to do charming things, and generally did things anything but charming. Even Flatman, even Bancks, could sometimes turn out a song or a copy of verses with something of the fine rapture, with a good deal of the careless-ordered ease, which charm us in their predecessors on the other side of "the flood." But even the active and loving efforts of Mr. Bullen and others have not extracted from them anything equal to the best things of Dorset, Rochester, Sedley, and "Astraea," and they must therefore be regretfully excluded from a Short History.

A paragraph will give the history of the four excepted persons, and another must suffice for their works. Charles Sackville, sixth

Earl of Dorset (the holders of the title had changed rapidly since his greater poetical ancestor received it, not three-quarters of a century before he succeeded), was born in 1637, not thirty years after the death of the author of *Gorboduc*, and, as Lord Buckhurst, was known not too creditably in the early days of the Restoration, though Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* shows how deep his interest in literature even then was. The tyranny, perhaps not more than the stupidity, of James II. sent him into opposition, and he became a great Williamite, but always was faithful to Dryden. He died in 1706, last, though born first, of the four. John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, a still better wit and poet, was a worse man, being a coward, spiteful, and in almost every way ungenerous. He was born in 1647, and educated at Wadham College, Oxford, came to court as quite a boy, played the typical Restoration bully and rake in all points but spirit for some fifteen years, and died just after his three-and-thirtieth birthday, after being, it is said, converted by Burnet. Sedley, a better poet than Dorset, and not quite so bad a man as Rochester, was born at Aylesford in 1639, was like Wilmot a Wadham man, figured in Charles's court and in outside orgies with Buckhurst, accepted "Revolution principles," less it would seem from patriotism than from a grudge at James for having debauched his daughter, the witty and ugly Countess of Dorchester (Dorset's Dorinda), and died in 1701. Afra, Aphra, Aphara, or Ayfara Behn is said to have been born at Wye near Ashford in 1640, but her history is most imperfectly known. She went to Guiana somehow, married a Dutch merchant, was a widow at six-and-twenty, wrote both plays and novels, which will appear in the next two chapters, and died in 1689.[1]

Restoration lyric.

This quartette lives and will live by songs, not always graceful in any sense, nearly always graceless in one particular; but of wonderful ease, air, and fire. Dorset's universally known "To all you ladies now on land," and his less popular "Phyllis, for shame," with certain charming epigrams and snatches, the most agreeable of all, if not the most correct, being that in praise of "Bonny Black Bess," have an amiable and careless facility which is extremely pleasing. Rochester, many of whose pieces, genuine or attributed, are so foul that they never appear in any decent collection, has left others of somewhat ill-natured and rather roughly expressed, but singularly shrewd criticism, and a handful of really exquisite songs, "I cannot change as others do," "My dear Mistress has a heart," "Absent from thee I languish still," "When on these lovely looks I gaze," "An age in

[1] Dorset and the producible poems of Rochester are in Chalmers; there are two eighteenth-century collections of Sedley's work; and that of Afra Behn has been reprinted in 6 vols. London, 1871.

her embraces past," and a few others, while he is at least the acknowledged father of the best epigram in the English language—

Here lies our Sovereign Lord the King.

Sedley (often spelt "Sidley" at the time) has fewer good things, but the splendid opening of one of his pieces—

Love still has something of the sea,
From whence his mother rose,

is not ill followed up, and "Phillis is my only joy," the "Knotting Song," and others rank very high; while Mrs. Behn provides at least one—

Love in fantastic triumph sat—

of quite bewildering beauty, suggesting the idea that some imp of poetry must have determined to upset all generalisations as to the verse of the time by inspiring it. Yet "Oh love that stronger art than wine" and others are not much below it. These pieces, with a few from the lesser hands glanced at above, are memorable as the last echoes of the marvellous song-concert of the first half of the century. After the deaths of Dryden and Sedley in 1700 and 1701, a hundred years passed without anything like them; nor perhaps has the gift been quite recovered since.

Apart from these, from Dryden and Butler, and from the survivors of the elder age, whether vocal like Milton or silent like Herrick, not merely the five-and-twenty years of Charles's reign, but the seventeen of his brother's, and of that of William and Mary, are woefully barren of poetry. The satiric impulse which produced through Dryden the greatest verse-work of the time, in the others chiefly served to show by how far Dryden himself out-topped his fellows. The satires attributed to Marvell — divers "Instructions" and "Advices to a Painter," "Britannia and Raleigh," "Dialogue between Two Horses," etc. — are partisan lampoons of extraordinary ferocity and not devoid of real vigour, but for the most part clumsy in form, following, whether designedly or not, the roughness of Donne, and never advancing beyond Cowley or Waller. John Oldham[1] enjoys a sort of traditional fame (due to his period, his early death, and the magnificent eulogy of Dryden) which he could hardly keep if many people read him. He was born near Tetbury in 1653, and went to St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, where he took his degree in 1674. He became usher in a school at Croydon, where Dorset, Rochester, and Sedley are said to have visited him, having been struck by his verses. They, or other patrons, recom-

Satires of Marvell and Oldham.

[1] Not in Chalmers, but very frequently reprinted in the late seventeenth century. Also ed. Bell, London, 1854. I use the sixth edition, 1703.

mended him to tutorships, and he died of the smallpox at Lord Kingston's seat of Holme Pierrepoint, aged barely thirty. His chief work was a satire, or rather several satires, on the Jesuits, which fed or caught the flame of the Popish Plot madness in 1679; and he wrote many other odes, satires, and translations. The roughness characteristic of Marvell is noticeable also in him, but he had learnt from Dryden's plays (he had no time to learn from his satires) to clench the couplet with a good hammer-stroke at the end.

It is to be feared that the delusion that decency and dulness are somehow inseparably connected may have been favoured by Pope's well-known compliment to Wentworth Dillon, Lord Roscommon:[1]

> In Charles's days,
> Roscommon only boasts unspotted bays;

for the absence of spot is about the only merit about them. The *Essay on Translated Verse*, which has given him an easy fame, is a very respectable exercise in a kind of couplet which, early as it is (written 1670, printed 1680), has already made great progress from the massive vigour of Dryden to the smoother but weaker elegance of Pope; the rest of him is negligible. Another noble bard of the time, John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave and Duke of Buckinghamshire, wrote couplets inferior to Roscommon's, and lyrics very inferior to Rochester's, yet some of these latter are not despicable. An *Essay on Satire*, which is attributed to the joint efforts of Mulgrave and Dryden, is too rude, as well as mostly too rough, for the poet, and too clever for the peer; it contains perhaps the best satiric couplet in the English language, outside of Dryden and Pope—

> Was ever prince by two at once misled,
> False, foolish, old, ill-natured and ill-bred?

The "two" being the Duchesses of Cleveland and Portsmouth.

The singular encomium of Johnson on *The Choice* of John Pomfret has excited the wonder of at least three generations, and nothing else of his has even titular fame. Stepney, a diplomatist and a translator, has left little to repay the explorer of him; the four monosyllables, King, Smith, Duke, and Sprat, less; "Granville the polite," some. But that friend of Dryden and Pope who is yoked in the latter's couplet as "knowing" with Granville, William Walsh, rises at intervals (especially in "Jealousy" and the quaint "Despairing Lover") above his dreary class. His thought has the unconventionality of the earlier time, and his expression, though very unequal, is sometimes not unworthy of it.

[1] Roscommon, with all who follow, in Chalmers. The *State Poems*, 3 vols. 1697-1704, contain much notable work, in a range beyond their title, and Dryden's *Miscellanies* (6 vols. *v.d.* and not all his doing) much more.

CHAPTER II

THE AGE OF DRYDEN—DRAMA

The stage at the Restoration—The Heroic play—Dryden's comedies—Etherege—Shadwell—Sedley—Mrs. Behn—Wycherley—*The Rehearsal*—The great artificial comedy—Congreve—Vanbrugh—Farquhar—Cibber—Mrs. Centlivre—Restoration tragedy—Dryden's Heroic plays—His blank-verse plays—His play-songs and prologues—Crowne and Settle—Otway—Lee—Southerne and Rowe.

THE twenty years' deprivation of dramatic entertainments which the English people had suffered naturally did not decrease their appetite for these. But the plays which were presented to them—perhaps the plays that they demanded—were of kinds strikingly different from those which had been in vogue before 1640. Not indeed that we must assume a total exclusion of the pre-Restoration drama from the theatre. Fletcher and Jonson long continued to hold the at least titular place of greatest English dramatists in critical—perhaps in vulgar—estimation. Shakespeare himself was acted, and not always in the travesties of Ravenscroft, Davenant, and (one has to add) Dryden. Others held the stage more or less, and there was room even for new plays of the old kind, such, for instance, as Chamberlayne's *Love's Victory*, under its stage title of *Wits Led by the Nose*, as late as 1678. But, as has to be so often repeated in literary history, facts of this kind are extremely delusive when taken by themselves. What we have to look to is the character of the plays of younger men, the theories advanced by younger critics, the mounting, in short, not the retreating, tide. It is because in literature ebb and flood always in this way overlap, instead of keeping apart with a clear interval between, that so many mistakes are made. The new currents did not make themselves distinctly perceptible immediately, and for a year or two the stage was supplied partly by old hands like Davenant (who, however, was himself a modern) and Shirley; partly by intermediate persons like Wilson, Tatham, Lacy, who are undecided in style and

The stage at the Restoration.

make no great mark in literature.[1] But they became noticeable, as regards comedy, to some extent in *The Wild Gallant* of Dryden, which dates from 1663, and still more in the *Love in a Tub* of Etherege, just after; as regards tragedy, in the "heroic" drama which the first named and others began to put on the stage before long, and which kept it for many years.

The change in comedy was naturally less than in tragedy, for all kinds of comedy differ little and are closely akin. The humour-comedy of Jonson, indeed, was stoutly kept up by Shadwell and others, and was too English a product ever to pass away entirely; and Dryden himself did not innovate so very much on the more distinctly romantic comedy of Fletcher. The comedy of the Restoration *par excellence* is a kind copied to some extent from French and Spanish originals, and relying, first, on a more or less definite plot, intrigue, or whatever term may be preferred; secondly, and still more, on witty dialogue. But the tragedy of the Restoration was a much more peculiar and anomalous phenomenon, and it is by no means equally easy to describe it in any terms at once accurate on the facts and likely to meet with general acceptance. It used to be complacently accepted, in common with many other literary symptoms of this special change, as a mere imitation of French models, fostered by the King's liking for everything French. That something in it was due to this is not denied; but more careful, and at the same time wider-ranging, criticism has long refused to allow any paramount importance to this origin. Another French influence, that of the heroic romances, the most famous of which are the work of Madeleine de Scudéry, has also been exaggerated, but is also a true cause in part. These things, in the originals and translated, had been very popular in England for some time, had left their mark on poetry, popular and unpopular, as has been noted above in reference to *Gondibert* and *Pharonnida*, and were in some cases actually dramatised in the heroic play. But this again will not do by itself, and cannot supply more than a small part of the required reasons.

The Heroic play.

The greater part of the real cause may probably be found in certain changes already noticed, and to be noticed again, which were now passing, by way of reaction, over the national literary taste. As most of these changes were in a direction of increased sobriety, it may seem at first contradictory to connect with them a product like the heroic tragedy, which is one of the most extravagant in the whole

[1] All three to be found in Maidment and Logan's *Dramatists of the Restoration*. Wilson, an Irish barrister, has no little power, but throws it into old forms. Other writers, older and younger — Howard, Killigrew, Tuke, Sir R. Fanshawe — would call for notice if space permitted.

history of literature. But this is only an apparent difficulty, not a real one.

This singular growth, which flourished specially for some fifteen or twenty years, but did not disappear wholly from the stage till long afterwards, so that it furnished jokes to Fielding's *Tom Thumb* nearly three-quarters of a century after the Restoration, has for its main theme love affairs and affairs of war, in each of which the heroes (ably seconded by the heroines) set common sense and natural language at defiance; and for form, a system of rhymed decasyllabic couplets, couched in the most emphatic style, and specially tending either to long harangues or to sharp interchange of single lines or distichs, something after the fashion of the *stichomythia* of the ancients. It is probable that the vehicle had more to do with it than the theme, though both were curiously well suited for each other. The couplet was the darling of the moment, and if this form of it is not good, no other is in English possible, for dramatic use. After the extraordinary shambling union of bad prose and worse blank verse which has been noticed, the neat, sharply exploding couplets not unnaturally gratified the public ear; and rant as rant had never been abhorrent to an English audience. Nay, as lending itself well to recitative, it was a kind of necessity to the half-operatic entertainment[1] which, as has been said, Davenant cleverly used as a shoe-horn to draw on his plays proper. In fine, the couplet was the mode, couplet-plays almost naturally invited "heroic" subjects, and the thing took shape.

It is curious and characteristic that Dryden, though at this time he had written very little, and had chiefly a vague Cambridge reputation of ability to go upon, was in the van of the new play movement with *The Wild Gallant*. And it is not less curious, and not less characteristic, that while the play is not a good one as it stands, it was apparently worse when it first appeared, and was damned. In its later form, which succeeded by the protection of Lady Castlemaine, it is a sort of Comedy of Humours, with a dash of Fletcher, more of the nondescript drama, which, as we have seen, had been popular from Middleton downwards, and a very little of the new repartee and fashionable slang. Dryden did much better than this in some of his numerous comic ventures,[2] but it cannot be said that his comedy was ever at

Dryden's comedies.

[1] In 1656 Davenant obtained leave to produce, at Rutland House in Aldersgate Street, an "Entertainment after the Manner of the Ancients," consisting of a verse prologue, and some Discourses by Diogenes and Aristophanes, a Parisian, a Londoner, etc., with songs and music. It was immediately followed by *The Siege of Rhodes*, a heroic play in operatic form.

[2] The best are, the comic part of the tragi-comic *Maiden Queen*, 1667; *The Mock Astrologer*, 1668; *Marriage à la Mode*, again tragi-comic, 1672; and *Amphitryon*, 1691.

the level either of his own powers or of the best performances of his contemporaries. His wit was not light enough; his temper was too kindly; and perhaps (for, though his birth was good and he married above it, he seems always to have been a home-keeping or tavern-haunting person, not desirous of gay society, nor shining in it) his habits too sedentary, for the airy, malicious genteel comedy which Etherege and Wycherley were to start, Congreve and Vanbrugh were to bring to perfection. One situation, that of the pair of lovers (it is characteristic again that with him, though with no one else of his time, they might be married) who are very fond of each other, and not really very fond of any one else, but who do their very best to pretend indifference or faithlessness, he made something like his own. At other times he either went near failure, or at any rate achieved no striking success, and too often he tried to make up for the absence of comedy by the presence of coarseness.

Etherege.

For the typical Restoration comedy we must look elsewhere. "Gentle" George Etherege[1] by the merest accident lost his due when Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar were collected by Leigh Hunt as "Dramatists of the Restoration," and in the usual way, after an interval, the injustice has been more than made up to him. He was born somewhere between 1634 and 1636, but as we do not know the date of his birth exactly, so we know nothing certainly about his extraction or his education. We do not even know when he was knighted, but it must have been pretty late in the reign, and quite early in it we find him a courtier, a companion of Buckhurst, and in 1664 author of *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub.* Four years later he wrote *She would if She could.* In 1676 he brought out his best play, *The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter*, and got into a scrape with the watch at Epsom. In 1685 he was appointed English Resident at Ratisbon, an important post, because the Diet of the Empire was held there. From this time onwards we have letters of his, and the old story that he died by falling downstairs *vino gravatus* has no authority; it is pretty certain that wherever he died it was not at Ratisbon, and there is fair, though not certain, evidence that it was at Paris before February 1691. In that case he had probably followed the fortunes of James II.

Etherege's three plays are very interesting; they are decidedly clever, and they have certainly some arrears of credit due to them in consequence of the priority too often denied on the strength of the gasconades of Wycherley. But their positive merit is perhaps somewhat less than might be gathered from the remarks of some of their

[1] Ed. Verity, London, 1888.

late panegyrists. *Love in a Tub* is at least as formless a thing as *The Wild Gallant* itself, and, like that, is a sort of hotch-potch of Jonson, Fletcher, and others, though, unlike that, it has couplet passages. The serious part (for there is a serious part) is beneath contempt; we have Middleton's own fashion turned inside out, and worthless tragic scenes tied to comic ones of some value. But even these last are very unequal, and the title-passages, those in which a French valet is imprisoned in a tub, are farce of the lowest. There is a good duel, and it is to Etherege's credit that the cloven foot of Restoration comedy—the passionless and malevolent licentiousness of too much thereof—does not appear. *She would if She could* is a great advance as a play, though the less said about its morals the better. It is thoroughly spirited. The heroine is amusing but not individual; her girl companions are rather good, but not better than Dryden's; the Prince Charming of the piece has still not descended to Restoration level. In the third, *Sir Fopling Flutter*, the wit and the composition are again improved as the ethics and æsthetics are lowered. Dorimant, the hero, has been variously said to be a study from Rochester and from the author himself; it seems pretty certain that Sir Fopling is a known character, Sir Car Scrope, and that Medley is Sedley. However this may be (and it is of small importance), the piece is a typical example of the style by an author who had made his *début* earlier than any other practitioner. It has plenty of wit, a considerable advance in stage merits on the earlier comedy, and a much more direct presentation of manners.

In 1668 appeared two other comic dramatists, neither of whom quite hit the new way of comic writing, but both of whom, as well as a third, the notorious Mrs. Behn, preceded Wycherley's certain appearance. Thomas Shadwell[1] was born of a good Norfolk family in 1640. We know little of his life, nor any reason except politics (he was a violent Whig) for the sudden change of a friendship, which had certainly existed between him and Dryden, into the enmity which drew from him the virulent though ineffective libel entitled *The Medal of John Bayes*, and provoked the crushing retorts of *MacFlecknoe* and the "Og" passage in the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*. He was rewarded at the Revolution with Dryden's forfeited laureateship, but died soon afterwards. Shadwell, who had a certain propensity to stimulants not merely alcoholic (he is said to have been an opium-eater), is said also to have been an agreeable companion, and of a wit

Shadwell.

[1] The only complete edition of Shadwell (4 vols. 1720) is very scarce and dear, most copies having perished in a fire. The present writer has edited for the "Mermaid Series" (London, 1903) a volume containing *The Sullen Lovers*, *A True Widow*, *The Squire of Alsatia*, and *Bury Fair*.

much lighter in conversation than in writing. His plays, however, though as mere literature deserving everything that Dryden has said of him, are yet by no means contemptible, and he himself provoked the oblivion which has fallen upon them. Of his seventeen pieces the first, *The Sullen Lovers*, both exemplified, and by its preface explicitly heralded, the style of almost all—a style closely modelled on Jonson's, and devoted still to the setting forth of "humours," very loosely compacted into a play. Besides his inability to "write," Shadwell has the drawbacks of a coarseness, excessive even for the time, and an almost invariable inability to achieve witty dialogue. But by way of setting to his humour he had the good luck to fix upon, and the good skill very fairly to achieve, a much distincter portraying of the manners, places, etc., of the time than men far more distinguished simply as men of letters have managed. Scott and Macaulay have been almost wholly indebted to his *Squire of Alsatia* (1689) for their pictures of that certainly picturesque if not edifying locality: *Epsom Wells* (1676) and *Bury Fair* (1686) give us sketches of seventeenth-century watering-places and holiday resorts, which do not come much behind those of the great novelists in merit, and long anticipate them in time. Shadwell's playhouse scenes, for all their clumsy writing, have a nature altogether different from the brilliant artificiality which, if it became more brilliant, also became much more artificial in the progress from Etherege to Congreve. If Shadwell imagined little, he heard and saw much, and he enables us in turn to see and hear such things as the question and answer of his fops about town—

(*Q.*) What play are they playing?
(*A.*) Some confounded play or other.

We know this to be *true;* and these truths relieve the bad construction, the want of distinct character, and the clumsy and ill-written dialogue of such plays as *The Miser* (1672), *The True Widow* (1679), *The Humourists* (1671), *The Virtuoso* (1676), *The Scowrers* (1691). *The Royal Shepherdess* is only a rehandling; but when Shadwell botches Shakespeare, as in *Timon*, tries the terrific, as in *The Libertine* (the earliest English version of the Don Juan story), or mixes politics and Irish humours in *The Lancashire Witches* or *Teague O'Divelly* (1682), it may well seem to the reader that Dryden was rather too mild than too severe in the immortal castigations which he administered to his quondam friend and gratuitous libeller. As for Shadwell's strictly poetical qualifications, they simply do not exist.

Sedley and Mrs. Behn[1] have been mentioned before as far as

[1] Editions as above.

their lives and poems go; their plays recall them here. Sedley, who is selected in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (*vide post*) as representative of the extreme French party in dramatic taste, was also recognised by others as one of the best dramatic critics of the time; but his actual plays are not great things. *The Mulberry Garden*, which had the same birth-year as *The Sullen Lovers*, presents the nondescript comedy, so often spoken of, charged with the new morals, or want of morals, of the time, and attempting repartee and Molièresque dialogue. *Bellamira* (1687), which made its appearance very much later, but seems to have been of no very different time in origin, is an adaptation of the *Eunuchus* of Terence, in which the capabilities of the subject in certain directions are liberally developed, and in which there are some smart speeches. But it cannot be called a good play, and in particular abuses the license of dramatic improbability to the greatest possible extent. *The Grumbler* is even more of an adaptation; and Sedley's tragedies do not deserve notice in the latter part of this chapter, but show that he had not unlearnt the shambling blank verse of earlier times.

Sedley.

Sedley, a man of fortune and fashion, merely wrote because it was part of the fashion to write; Mrs. Behn had to write for her living. Her plays are not as such by any means so remarkable as her poems (which mostly occur in them) or her novels, but they are numerous and far from despicable, nor is there much justification for Pope's singling them out as specially immoral. At the same time Afra, if not much worse than others, is quite bad enough, while, like Sedley, she requires no notice in respect of her serious or tragical work, though this sometimes gives occasion to her finest lyric. *The Rover, or The Banished Cavaliers* (1677-81), a double play in two long parts, is generally most praised, perhaps because it is really the best, perhaps because it comes first in the printed copies and many readers do not get farther. But *The City Heiress* is also a pleasant incident play of its own kind, and *The Town Fop*, *The Lucky Chance*, *The Widow Ranter*, *Sir Patient Fancy*, and others reveal themselves pretty clearly by their titles.

Mrs. Behn.

It must at least be said for William Wycherley[1] (whose reputed claims to priority, it is fair to remember, we have not from himself but on bad and late authority) that whether he wrote first or not, he certainly wrote best of the comic authors of Charles II.'s reign. He was the son and heir of a good old family in Shropshire, where he

[1] The edition of Leigh Hunt, containing also Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar, has long been the standard for this quartette. All, however, in whole or in part, appear in the "Mermaid Series," and have also been separately edited.

was born about 1640. He resided in France, where he had the advantage of the *salon* of Julie d'Angennes, Duchess of Montausier, who, however, cannot have exercised upon him the purifying influence attributed in reference to her compatriot wits. After the Restoration he returned to England and resided some time at Queen's College, Oxford, though he does not seem to have matriculated; and he found himself probably more at home at the Middle Temple. He had, according to Pope, his friend later, already written *Love in a Wood;* but no statement of Pope's is ever to be accepted without corroboration, and here we have none. The play did not actually appear till 1672, and attracted to Wycherley, who was very handsome, the spare attentions of Barbara Palmer, Duchess of Cleveland, which he shared with Marlborough and many others. For some years he was rather a prominent courtier, and he produced *The Gentleman Dancing Master* (1673), *The Country Wife* (1675), and *The Plain Dealer* (1677), in pretty rapid succession. It seems to have been after this that he married the Countess Dowager of Drogheda, a lady nobly born as well as connected, handsome and well dowered. But she is said to have been very jealous, and though she left Wycherley at her death, not very long afterwards, all the money she could, the legacy only brought him law-suits and a long imprisonment for debt. As a very old man he made the acquaintance of Pope, succeeded at the death of his father, who must have been a nonagenarian, to the family estate, married again and settled a jointure on his wife, and died immediately afterwards in 1715.

Wycherley.

He seems to have earned the liking as well as the admiration of his contemporaries, and while they recognised

> The satire, wit, and strength of manly Wycherley,

they do not seem to have attributed to him any of the ill-nature which we see in his own Manly. His ability is shown within a rather small compass. *Love in a Wood* is not superior, or very little superior, to most of the comedies mentioned in the last few paragraphs, and though it is unjust to call *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, as Hazlitt has called it, a "long, foolish farce," it has no great merit. But *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer* (the latter an extremely free following of Molière's *Misanthrope*) are simply the strongest and wittiest plays of the comic kind produced in England between Fletcher and Congreve, that is to say, for more than sixty years. They are deeply tarred with the Restoration brush of coarseness, so much so that even the next century, little troubled as it was with squeamishness, had to adjust the plot of *The Country Wife* to more decent and savoury conditions. Nor have they any prominent merit of con-

struction; it has been said that no plays of this period have. But Wycherley has made great progress in the type-character of his French originals over all his contemporaries; he has some very original figures, such as the Widow Blackacre of *The Plain Dealer*. And, above all, he has discovered and put in practice, to no small measure and extent, the particular forte of his own kind in his own time. Etherege, Sedley, even Dryden, though it was out of his way, had all been trying to hit off the smart repartee and sparkling dialogue which Molière had given in French. But Wycherley was the first who did this really well and pretty constantly. It is true that the fault of the style makes its appearance with the merits. It cannot be said that the action of *The Country Wife*, to take the earliest instance, at all requires, or is to any appreciable degree helped by, the hit-or-miss witticisms which Horner and his friends allow themselves for pages in the very first scene of the very first act. But in hardly any Restoration play have we any better action, and here we, at any rate, have the tongue-fence to amuse ourselves with instead.

Some of the writers chiefly noticeable as tragedians wrote comedies, but hardly anything of theirs deserves actual notice except the *Sir Courtly Nice* of Crowne (*vide infra*). But there is one other famous comic work of the reign of Charles II. which must be dealt with, and that is *The Rehearsal*[1] (1671), attributed to the Duke of Buckingham, but pretty certainly the work in the main of coadjutors, who included even the Roman hand of Butler himself. From the first the piece, which was for years on the stocks, was meant to attack a Laureate, whence the name Bayes, but Dryden was not Laureate at the time that it was begun, and it was aimed at Davenant. Nor, though there are undoubted strokes at Dryden personally, is he responsible for all the things ridiculed in it. The play is, in fact, a cento of extracts or parodies from heroic tragedies strung together and attached to a roughly sketched scenario of the same heroic kind. The idea is, of course, not entirely new, but had never been carried out in quite the same way, and naturally caused a great deal of amusement. It has been twice imitated in very popular pieces, the *Tom Thumb* of Fielding and the *Critic* of Sheridan, and though the latter is certainly even better than *The Rehearsal*, *The Rehearsal* itself is admirably good. *The Rehearsal.*

The glory, however—a glory by no means unmixed with shame—of this Restoration drama was not reached till long after the Restoration itself, and by a set of men whose knowledge of the brilliant brutal ways of that time was mostly traditional and literary. There is much less reality about Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar than about

[1] Ed. Arber.

Shadwell and Sedley; and it is this which gave such validity as it has to the whimsical attempt of Charles Lamb to excuse their want of decency and of morals in every sense. But in fact no excuses are possible, and the least valid of all is that which attempts to shield them under the mantle of the classics. The actual license of Aristophanes, in some directions of act and word, is very much beyond that of Congreve and Vanbrugh. But Aristophanes does not, like Vanbrugh and Congreve, make faithlessness a distinction and brutality an order of merit. On this point there can be no "transaction"; but having pronounced on it, we may proceed to do justice to the literary merit of these authors, which in some ways is of almost the highest degree. Their forte is still not composition, which in all the three (in Vanbrugh perhaps least) is weak, but, as before, in the amusing nature of the scattered scenes and characters and, far more than before or ever again, in the unceasing salvo of verbal wit which rings through their best pieces.

The great artificial comedy.

William Congreve, the greatest of the three in their special greatness, was a cadet of a good Staffordshire family seated at a place whence it took its name, but was born (February 1670) in Yorkshire, at a house near Leeds which belonged to his mother's uncle. His father, a soldier, became a land-agent in Ireland, and Congreve was educated at its then best grammar school, Kilkenny, and at Trinity College, Dublin, whence he passed to the Middle Temple in London. He began in literature with a prose tale, *Incognita* (1692), which few have read but which some have managed to praise, and soon submitted his first play, *The Old Bachelor*, to Dryden, who praised it highly, put it perhaps a little into stage shape, and got it acted in January 1693. Within the same year, for Congreve certainly had the precocity which Wycherley perhaps affected, came *The Double Dealer*. *Love for Love* came in April 1695, *The Mourning Bride* two years later, and *The Way of the World* in 1700. This last, for what reason it is difficult to conceive, was not successful, and Congreve, who had already been annoyed by the protest of Jeremy Collier (*vide infra*) against his style, left the stage never to return. He received valuable Government places, wrote a masque or two and some very excellent lyrics in the artificial style, and died in 1729, leaving most of his money to Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough.

Congreve.

Congreve's tragedy will have its place later; his four comedies advance with a singularly even and rapid progression. *The Old Bachelor* is not much, if at all, better than Wycherley, and its hero (not the title hero), Vainlove, is, with a young man's exaggeration, made to outdo all the other heroes from Dorimant downward, whom he copies, in loveless and joyless debauchery. *The Double Dealer* is

a very great improvement, though it is almost more of a tragi-comedy than a comedy, and might, indeed, with very slight alteration of incident and hardly any of language, have come to the sanguinary end which it very nearly reaches in fact. The characters of Lady Touchwood and of Maskwell, her nephew and gallant, have a touch not merely of villainy but of sombre sullenness about them, which cannot but be felt as rather out of place; indeed, it is in this play and in *The Way of the World*, much more than in *The Mourning Bride*, that Congreve shows the tragic power he certainly possessed. This shadow entirely disappears from *Love for Love*, which is all pure comedy, albeit behind some of the merriment there is little real mirth. Probability and strict stage construction are still as much to seek here as elsewhere, and no one of the characters is a whole live personage like those of Shakespeare in the drama before, and those of Fielding in the novel later. But, on the other hand, there is hardly one who, as a personage of artificial comedy, is not a triumph, from Sir Sampson Legend, the testy father, through his sons Valentine (spendthrift and rake, but a better fellow than most of them) and Ben, the simple sailor, who was now becoming a stock stage figure; through the sisters Foresight and Frail, whose simultaneous discovery of each other's slips is one of the capital moments of English comic literature; and the foolish astronomer, Foresight; and Tattle, the frivolous beau; and Jeremy, the impossibly witty servant; and Angelica, giving us the contemporary notion of a heroine who is neither heartless nor a fool; and Prue, the hoyden. All these are, for purely theatrical flesh and blood, perfect triumphs in their kind, and they move throughout in a perfect star-shower of verbal fireworks.

Yet Congreve had not exhausted himself. *The Way of the World*, though in some points it returns to the mixed and semi-tragic, or at least serious, cast of *The Double Dealer*, is a better-knit play than *Love for Love*, and contains in Millamant, the coquettish heroine, the queen of all her kind. Congreve has indeed borrowed the lay figure for her—and something more—from an excellent play which nobody reads, Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode*, but he has given her a tenfold portion of air and fire, and indeed left nothing to be done in the same direction. Lady Wishfort, too, is another masterly personage, and the more sinister figures of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are full of power, which indeed, in one way or another, few of the characters lack. What none of them lack is wit, the mere writing of the play being better than that of *Love for Love* itself.

Sir John Vanbrugh, at least the rival of Congreve at his best, but far more unequal, was born no one seems quite to know where or when. He himself, perhaps in joke, said that the place was the Bastile, and he was certainly much abroad, though his family seems

to have been long transferred from the Netherlands to England. The date is supposed to have been about 1666. He was a soldier, a herald (he became Clarencieux King-at-Arms), and latterly a very well-known architect, Blenheim and Castle Howard being only the greatest of his performances in this line, from which some structural advantages have been good-naturedly argued to his plays. We hear positively of him first in 1695, when he was appointed by Evelyn secretary to the Greenwich Hospital Commission, and two years later, in 1697, his first play, *The Relapse*, appeared. Next year came *The Provoked Wife*, and the last on which his reputation rests, *The Confederacy*, in 1705. Vanbrugh wrote several others, but they were mostly translations or adaptations from Molière and Boursault, and of little value, though his unfinished *Journey to London* has stronger points. He was knighted in 1714, at the coming of the Hanoverians, and died in 1726.

Vanbrugh.

It is a little odd that *The Relapse* is an avowed continuation of a play by another dramatist, Colley Cibber (see below), produced the year before, and entitled *Love's Last Shift*. Vanbrugh kept the characters, but treated them in a style to which Cibber (who himself acted in the sequel) had no pretensions. Lord Foppington (the Sir Novelty Fashion of the earlier play) is the last and by far the best of the line begun by Sir Fopling Flutter; indeed, he forms a better pair to Congreve's Millamant than anything of Congreve's own; and his final resignation to his brother of the bride of whom that cadet has cheated him, "Dear Tam, since things are thus fallen aut, prithee, give me leave to wish you jay! I do it *de bon cœur*, strike me dumb! You have married a woman beautiful in her person, charming in her airs, prudent in her canduct, canstant in her inclinations, and of a nice marality, split my windpipe!" reaches the sublime of the comic. *The Provoked Wife* and *The Confederacy*, though a little less witty, are perhaps better as plays, and certainly more original. Sir John Brute, the hero of the first named, has been very highly praised, and deserves the praise, with the limitations already made, that he is rather a type than an individual, and that his life is stage life. *The Confederacy* is the most uniform, the best moving, and perhaps the best charactered, of all Vanbrugh's plays, and it is particularly noticeable for the author's having dared to make it a middle-class play throughout. The lords and baronets so common in the Restoration drama vanish, to be replaced by a pair of money-scriveners (like the fathers of Milton and Gray), their wives and families, a dealer in old clothes and money-lending, and her son, etc. But with the loss in gentility there is a gain in liveliness, and Corinna, the heroine, if still a little stagey, has stage life to the full.

George Farquhar, the last and youngest of the trio, was the son

of a clergyman, and was born at Londonderry in 1678. As his first comedy, *Love and a Bottle*, was produced the year after Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, he was on a level with, and almost in advance of, the rest of his group in early writing. He had previously been an undergraduate of Trinity College, Dublin, an actor (he is said to have left the stage because he nearly killed a brother actor by accident in a stage duel), and an officer in the army; nor did he give up this latter profession till just before his death, which happened in his thirtieth year. He had married, and, it is said, had experienced one of the tricks so common on the stage of his time, being deceived by his wife as to her fortune. But he is also said to have in no way punished her for her deceit; indeed, the general tradition of him is of a good-natured and amiable, though slightly feather-brained, person. This tradition was possibly founded on, and is certainly not out of harmony with, the seven plays which (with some miscellanies in prose and verse) he left behind him. For these plays are much more good-natured than those of Congreve and Vanbrugh, though there is looseness enough in their morality. They also exhibit a steady improvement, which, considering the author's youth at his death, makes it probable that he would have done things even better than *The Beaux-Stratagem* had he lived. *Love and a Bottle*, the first, is no great thing, being almost undistinguishable, except that it has a little more of the new wit, from many plays of many writers. *The Constant Couple, or a Trip to the Jubilee*, and *Sir Harry Wildair*, two plays connected after a fashion in which the time took pleasure as first and second part, and presenting some resemblances in scheme to Cibber and Vanbrugh's pair, have more merit. But they probably owed most of their popularity with their own and succeeding generations to the impudent ease with which the favourite actress, Peg Woffington, in man's clothes, played Sir Harry. *The Inconstant* and *The Way to Win Him* are far from achieving the excellence of the last pair, *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux-Stratagem*. There is a vividness and gusto about the scenes of the first, and the parts of Captain Plume and his sergeant Kite, which at least does not discourage the supposition that Farquhar drew on his personal experiences in recruiting and country quarters; though, if "Silvia" be the damsel who deceived him, his magnanimity was certainly not small. *The Beaux-Stratagem*, which, though not much to boast of from the moral point of view, is one of the least morally objectionable plays of the whole set, also deserves the repute it has retained above almost all of them by the liveliness of the incidents and dialogues, the happy humour-characters of the servant Scrub and Boniface the rascally landlord, the ingenious impudence of Archer, and the well-written parts of Squire and Mrs. Sullen.

Farquhar.

The protest of Jeremy Collier (see next chapter) either produced, or more probably coincided with, a certain change of public taste in comedy, and though the plays from 1700 onwards are by no means remarkable, as a rule, for squeamishness, they are not merely freer from "immorality and profaneness," but distinctly humaner in tone, than those of the forty years between 1660 and 1700. They are also much worse as literature. Those of Steele and Addison had best be noticed with other works of their respective writers, but two dramatists who belong to both periods—to the earlier in general style, to the later in a certain modification of the ranker features of the Restoration play—may be despatched here. One of them, indeed,

Cibber.

Colley Cibber,[1] has been mentioned already, and will be mentioned yet again in connection with Pope. He was born in 1671, the son of a sculptor of much note and some merit, and became an actor and playwright early, as well as later Poet-Laureate, being also long manager of Drury Lane. The usual edition of Cibber's works contains sixteen plays, but he is said to have written nearly double that number. *Love's Last Shift* itself, *The Careless Husband*, and *The Nonjuror* (an adaptation of *Tartuffe*) are the best known of them. Most are fairly lively, but hardly any is really literature.

Very similar, though a little better at their best, are the nineteen pieces of Susannah Centlivre,[2] who is believed to have been born about 1680. She was the daughter of a Lincolnshire gentleman

Mrs. Centlivre.

named Freeman, but seems to have passed her girlhood in poor circumstances, and as an orphan. She was thrice married, her third husband being, as her admiring female biographer calls him, "a French gentleman." Of him history records that he, being a connoisseur in cookery, obliged King William and Queen Anne by condescending to superintend their kitchen as yeoman, whence he is indeed called by some a cook. She died in 1722. The best of her plays are *The Busybody* and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, from the last of which comes at least one universally known and quoted phrase, "the real Simon Pure." They are nearer literature than Cibber's, but they are chiefly interesting because they show the change of taste. The theme is still intrigue, but it is almost always unsuccessful.

The tragic authors of the period and their tragedies occupy a position on the whole less important, though distinctly curious. With all their faults, there can be no doubt that comedies like *Love for Love*, *The Confederacy*, and *The Beaux-Stratagem* mark in certain directions an advance upon all English comic work before them,

[1] *Dramatic Works*, 4 vols. London, 1760.
[2] *Works*, 3 vols. London, 1761; reprinted, 1872.

except that of Shakespeare, with which they do not compare. On the other hand, *All for Love* and *Venice Preserved*, not to mention others, do come into pretty direct competition with *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, and are, with all their merits, inferior not merely to these, but to many others. The difference is not in the least surprising. For poetry is not necessary to comedy, and is absolutely necessary to tragedy. And it is precisely in poetry that the second half of the seventeenth century is inferior to the first.

Restoration tragedy.

The tragedy of the time divides itself, with the usual overlapping, into two parts—the Heroic drama, already discussed, which was triumphant between 1660 and 1680, and did not entirely disappear between 1680 and 1700; and the blank-verse tragedy, altered in spirit rather than in intention from that "before the flood," which was not quite absent in the first time, and which prevailed once more in the second. In both periods and in both kinds the mighty craftsmanship of Dryden led the way, and despite the traditional repute of *Venice Preserved*, it is impossible here to admit that any examples surpassed *The Conquest of Granada* in the first kind, and *All for Love* in the second.

Dryden's Heroic plays.

The Rival Ladies, which is Dryden's first serious play, and which followed *The Wild Gallant* at no great interval, is neither wholly tragic nor wholly comic, neither wholly rhymed nor wholly blank verse and prose. But *The Indian Emperor* (1665), following an *Indian Queen*, in which he had helped his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard, was his first distinct and original venture wholly in the new style. *The Maiden Queen* (1667) is a blend of tragic, or at least serious, heroics and comic prose. But *Tyrannic Love, or The Royal Martyr* (1669), a dramatisation of the legend of St. Catherine, first exhibited the heroic style in perfection. The rants of the Emperor Maximin and the preposterous character of some of the incidents were bywords even in their own day, but the splendid rhetoric of the best passages, the rattling single-stick play of the rhyming dialogue, and the really noble sentiment of much of it, almost excuse the enthusiasm of audiences for a style full of the most glaring faults. This is still more the case with the two parts of *The Conquest of Granada* (1670), which brought the kind to its highest perfection, purged it of some of the absurdities which were not, as most were, inherent, and certainly contains many of the best pieces of declamation, and not a few of not the worst pieces of poetry, in the English language.

The Rehearsal came out very shortly, but it did not in the least "kill" heroics, which continued to flourish. For a time, indeed, Dryden chiefly wrote comedies or tragi-comedies; but the most

curious of all his experiments, the "tagging" of *Paradise Lost* into a drama, *The State of Innocence*, which is half an opera and more than half a Heroic play, shows the undiminished popularity of the style. And in 1675 appeared the extremely fine *Aurengzebe*, still heroic. This, however, contains both indirect evidence and a direct confession that the author was tiring of rhyme, the latter in a statement of the prologue, and the former throughout, in the constant preference of overlapped or enjambed lines to the strict couplet. Nothing can better show Dryden's literary peculiarities both in strength and weakness than the fact that, when he turned from rhyme to blank verse, he actually took a play of Shakespeare's for something more than the canvas of his new attempt. It is true that in the identity of subject of *All for Love* and *Antony and Cleopatra* we must not see too much. Not merely was it the habit of the time to refurbish old work, not merely had Dryden himself a peculiar theory about what he called "translation," but from the very infancy of the Elizabethan drama itself it had been the almost invariable habit to refashion older plays. The really extraordinary thing in *All for Love* is not that it follows *Antony and Cleopatra*, but that, in following, it keeps so far from plagiarism; not that its kind is inferior to Shakespeare's, but that it achieves such excellence as it does in that kind. The fact is that it is a great, and a very great, play, with more of the earth and less of the air in it than in its model. It stands on an entirely different footing from the travesty of *Troilus and Cressida*, which followed it in 1679; but the scenes which Dryden contributed to Lee's *Oedipus* and *Duke of Guise* contain some of his very best work. When his apparent ruin at the Revolution drove him back to the stage, the first play he wrote, in 1690, was the very fine tragedy of *Don Sebastian* (which the older criticism put at the head of his work in this kind, though nowadays *All for Love* is mostly preferred), and while his last play of all, *Love Triumphant*, was a tragi-comedy, the last but one, *Cleomenes*, was a pure tragedy and a fine one.

His blank-verse plays.

Dryden's all but invariable primacy was also well displayed in two adjuncts to the drama of the time, one of which it possessed in common with that of the last age, while the other was more, though still not quite, peculiar to it. The first of these consisted of the songs with which it was still customary to intersperse, and here, if he nowhere quite equals the surpassing gems of Sedley and Mrs. Behn, he has a much larger number of very high average quality. The other lay in the Prologue and Epilogue, which, occasional if not rare before 1640, became after 1660 one of the most regular and popular appurtenances of plays. The fashion was no doubt much helped by the introduction of women on the stage, for the prologues

and epilogues were usually, though not invariably, spoken by the prettiest and most favourite actresses. By degrees it became customary for novices, or those who were not confident in their own powers of verse (these pieces were all but invariably in the smartest style of the new couplet) to get friends, for love or for money, to help them out, and Dryden's own scanty income was eked in no small degree by sums thus received, while his prologues and epilogues to his own and others' plays make a very considerable section of his work. Their matter is more unequal than their form, for, being addressed specially *ad vulgus*, they offered too great temptation to aim at popularity first of all; and the political savagery of some of these pieces, the license of the language and imagery in others, must have counted for not a little in his sense of the necessity, if not the adequacy, of the antithetic excuse formulated by Johnson later—

His play-songs and prologues.

> For we that live to please must please to live.

Dryden's earliest and longest-lived rival, or rather contemporary, in tragedy was John Crowne—"starch Johnny Crowne," as Rochester called him from some real or imputed primness. Crowne[1] was a Nova-Scotian, and is thought to have been born as early as 1640, and to have died as late as 1705. He supplied the stage for nearly thirty years with some eighteen plays, the best of which is the adapted comedy of *Sir Courtly Nice*, already mentioned, and said to have been, like other good plays and poems, due to the suggestion of Charles himself. Crowne was once utilised by Rochester's spite to vex Dryden, his masque of *Calisto* being preferred to something of the Laureate's for a court entertainment. He wrote a rhymed tragedy, *Caligula*, as late as 1698, and had an inclination rather to the tragic than to the comic muse. His singular *Destruction of Jerusalem*, also heroic, though little read deserves reading, and he is at any rate far above his adversary Elkanah Settle, the "Doeg" of the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*. In the early *furore* for heroic plays, Settle, who was born in 1648, produced in 1673 one entitled *The Empress of Morocco*, which was thought by the younger sort quite to put Dryden in the shade, and was printed with elaborate engravings. It is curious that Dryden, losing for once his usual Olympian indifference, joined Crowne and Shadwell (the very man whom he was afterwards to couple with Settle) in attacking *The Empress*. Settle wrote much else, became city poet and a puppet-show keeper, and died at an

Crowne and Settle.

[1] Among Maidment and Logan's *Dramatists of the Restoration*, 4 vols. Edinburgh, 1873.

advanced age in 1724, half pitied, half jeered at by the wits of the next generation.

Somewhat younger, and very much better, were three other dramatists who with Dryden exhibit the tragic abilities of Charles II.'s time at the best—Otway, Lee, and Southerne. Their merits as playwrights follow the order of their birth, though Lee is far the best poet of the three. Thomas Otway[1] was born in 1651. He was the son of a Sussex clergyman, and cannot have been ill off, since he entered Christ Church, Oxford, as a gentleman commoner. But the stage had more attraction for him than the Church, though he was quite a failure as an actor, and for the moment turned to the army, where he obtained a cornetcy, as some say, though others supposed him only to have enlisted. He certainly served more than one campaign. But the theatre continued to exercise its fascination, which was made stronger in his case by the charms of Mrs. Barry, a beautiful actress, who appeared in his first play, *Alcibiades*. He seems to have had Rochester for a rival, and certainly had him for a libeller. In 1676 he followed *Alcibiades* with *Don Carlos*, a rhyming play of some merit in its kind, and then turned to adaptations from the French and rubbishy comedies. But in 1680 he produced one of his two great plays, *The Orphan*, with a *Caius Marius* which is less good, and in 1682 his masterpiece, *Venice Preserved*. Three years later, having in the interval written a bad comedy, *The Atheist*, he died miserably, it is said by choking himself after semi-starvation.

Otway.

His misfortunes however, like Chatterton's, have perhaps helped his fame. Both in his own time, during the eighteenth century, and even beyond it, Monimia and Belvidera, the heroines of *The Orphan* and of *Venice Preserved*, were among the most favourite parts both with tragic actresses and their audiences, while *Venice Preserved* at least has kept to the present day a traditional reputation as the best tragedy out of Shakespeare, the only tragedy of great merit subsequent to the Restoration, and so forth. It is perhaps fortunate for Otway that the validity of these praises is not often tested by reading. There is certainly pathos in both plays, and a good deal of diffused tragic passion of various kinds. Nor should the utter worthlessness of the comic or semi-comic parts of *Venice Preserved* be charged heavily against Otway. But that prosaic element which is such a favourite objection to the time seems, to some at least, to appear here more than it does in Dryden, more than it does in Lee. Otway's verse has resonance but no melody, his sentiment pathos, but neither refinement nor strangeness, nor always strict tragic quality. Above

[1] *Works*, 3 vols. London, 1757.

all, neither in sound nor in sense has he any *suggestiveness*. The declamation of Dryden and the rant of Lee pass in many passages into poetry; it is difficult to put the finger on a single one of Otway's of which, putting the mere appeal to sentiment aside, as much can be said. With the elocution of the "star," the beauty of the actress, the accompaniment of the theatre, he may thrill; in the study, and read, he does not.

On that side, indeed, of the drama which is not literature but stage-craft, Otway has very strong appeals. It has been noticed by the late Mr. Roden Noel[1] that even his comedies are much better constructed, and present a much more coherent fable to the audience, than most of the plays of the time. And this is still more the case with his two great tragedies. Unpresentable as is *The Orphan* to a modern audience, its pathos is perfectly true and just in itself, and much more tragic than that of *Venice Preserved*. Castalio, one of the two brothers who are in love with Monimia, has brought upon himself the punishment which he receives in the deceit practised on her by the other brother Polydore, first by his own braggart and libertine sneers at marriage, which make Polydore take dishonourable designs for granted, and secondly by stealing a march upon Polydore himself. So too in *Venice Preserved*, though the unamiable and exaggerated rant of the time appears in the character of Pierre throughout, though Belvidera is stagey to the last degree, and Jaffier seems quite unreasonably to vent wrath for the ruin which is due to his own folly on the world at large, yet Otway has throughout a fast hold on his audience.

It is on the literary side that he fails. His verse is not merely harsh and unmusical: he is deeply affected by the slovenly colloquialisms and degradations of style which, as we shall see in the next chapter, were at this time jeopardising English style altogether, and which Dryden was almost alone in resisting. This drawback is of itself almost fatal. In the dying speech of Monimia, the climax of one of the most heartrending scenes and situations to be found, outside the greatest examples of Elizabethan tragedy, there occurs this distich—

> Speak well of me, and if thou hear ill tongues
> Speak evil of my fame, *don't hear me wronged.*

To any one with an ear this "don't" (which cannot be helped away by resolving it into "do not" with a slur) means simply gnashing of teeth.

But even this is not so fatal as the astounding absence in Otway of poetical expression to suit his poetical sentiment. In all the

[1] In his "Mermaid" edition of Otway, London, 1888.

famous passages of *Venice Preserved*, that between Jaffier and Pierre, the scaffold scene, and the rest, I cannot remember one phrase, one "jewel five words long," that gives the sudden blaze proper to poetry. In *The Orphan* there is nothing better than Polydore's speech as he drops his sword and runs on his brother's—

Now my Castalio is again my friend;

and though this is adequate and passable, we cannot help thinking how not merely Shakespeare, but half a dozen others, Middleton, Webster, Fletcher, Tourneur, Ford, even Shirley, would have phrased it, nay, how Dryden, and not only Dryden, among Otway's own contempories, would have been equal to the occasion.

The stars of Lee [1] were not much more auspicious than Otway's own, though they spared him the touch of squalor which lies on the luckless bard of Belvidera. Nathaniel, generally known as Nat, Lee was born in 1655, the son of a clergyman in Hertfordshire, and, like his great collaborator Dryden, was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge. He too became an actor early, and turned from acting to play-writing. But his mind was soon clouded by insanity; he was for years at intervals an inmate of the madhouse, and when he died, it is said from injuries received in a drunken squabble, at the age of thirty-seven, in 1692, he was probably as much mad as drunk.[2] He was only twenty when his first play, *Nero*, came out. It is heroic, but bastard-heroic, the rhymes being not continuous, but interspersed with passages of blank verse and prose. *Sophonisba*, the next, on a subject which seems to have had a sort of hereditary attraction for all the more boisterous sort of tragedians, is entirely in rhyme, as is *Gloriana, or The Court of Augustus Caesar*, produced in the same year. Next year, 1677, gave the *Rival Queens*, and the next again *Mithridates*. Both these plays, which were the most popular of the author (the "Rival Queens," Statira and Roxana, continuing for many years to be favourite characters on the stage), were in blank verse, with no prose, and with rhyme only used now and then in the old way at the end of scenes, or to top speeches where a clap was expected. Some of Lee's very best work is to be found in *Oedipus*, where he worked with Dryden on a very fair level. The other combination of the two in *The Duke of Guise* was not quite so successful, though the play contains fine things. In the rest of Lee's work, which is wholly confined to tragedy, and which comprises

Lee.

[1] *Works*, 3 vols. London, 1734.

[2] Another story is that he escaped from his keepers on a snowy night, and died of exposure.

Theodosius, *The Princess of Cleve*, *The Massacre of Paris*, *Caesar Borgia*, and *Constantine the Great*, his defects are perhaps more obvious than his merits. But as his best work is not free from the former, so the latter are perceivable even in his worst.

On the whole, Lee has been more harshly judged than any other English dramatist. His foible for rant early became a byword, and was no doubt exaggerated by the knowledge of his madness. The form in which he wrote at least part of his works—the heroic rhymed tragedy—is the very worst in the world for bringing out the contrast of bombast and bathos, which Dryden himself by no means very often escapes, and to which all others succumb. Lee's excitable brains were not, and could not be expected to be, critical; indeed, he flings out fine things and foolish things with equal indifference, or rather with equal enthusiasm. Lastly, it must be confessed that he comes far below Otway, or rather hardly enters into competition with him, either as a constructor of plots or a creator of situations. There certainly is pathos in Lee, but it is chiefly given him by his stories, or by a gift to be noticed presently, not by his power of appealing directly to the sympathy of the audience. His plots and his characters are all framed with a view to rapid superficial effect of sound and fury, and they rush across the stage in successive blasts which leave the spectator, or indeed the reader, not quite uninterested, not by any means cold, and not even wholly contemptuous even of the flatnesses and frigidities. But they make no appeal to sympathy; and, but for the one reserved point again, they are too unreal to inspire terror.

That one reserved point, however, is that Lee is a poet. It is not merely that his versification, though unequal, is far better than Otway's. It is that he has the faculty (as the greatest critics have been driven to express it) of saying things "in a poetical way." His finest passage of all—one in *Mithridates* on Death—is not, any more than the finest passages of others, absolutely original in thought. He may have got it from Raleigh, he may have got it from Marston, with whom he has at least the connection that they both wrote *Sophonisbas*. But he has put it for himself and made it, or remade it, poetry. Again take—

> To the driven air my flying soul is fastened.

Nobody but a poet could have put "driven" and "flying" where they are. Otway never would have thought of it. And again—

> Oh pity that so fair a star should be
> The child of night.

He not only has the *word*, "the lovely chance-word," as he says

somewhere himself, but he can arrange it in verbal and rhythmical arrangement, perfect in sense and sound.

Thomas Southerne—the chief tragic dramatist of the reign of Anne—though a lesser man than either Otway or Lee, still claims place by right, and Nicholas Rowe perhaps by tradition. After Rowe, no one who owes his place in literature to drama will come in our way till Sheridan, though a few men of distinction in other ways also wrote for the theatre, and a few playwrights pure and simple may find corners somewhere.

Southerne and Rowe.

Southerne[1] was an Irishman by birth, though not by extraction, and was born in Dublin county in the year 1659. Trinity College received him and sent him to the Middle Temple, whence, like other playwrights of the time, he proceeded not merely to play-writing, but to service for a time in the army. Although possessed of an eye to the main chance—Pope's well-known couplet,

> Tom, whom Heaven sent down to raise
> The price of prologues and of plays,

glances on the one hand at Dryden's having doubled his tariff for prologue-furnishing in the case of Southerne's *Loyal Brother*, on the other at the profits which the young dramatist himself made—as well as of literary talent, he was liked and respected by three generations of men of letters, from Dryden, who was on as good terms with him as with Congreve, through the Addison and Pope set, till nearly the middle of the eighteenth century, when he died at a great age in 1746, having made the acquaintance of Gray.

Rowe,[2] whose translation of Lucan obtained the, at first sight, astounding sentence from Johnson that it is "one of the greatest productions of English poetry," was of a good Devonshire family, but was born in Bedfordshire in 1673, his father being a lawyer of some note. Nicholas was sent to Westminster, but not to any university, his father thinking it better for him to enter the Middle Temple at once, that he might, it may be supposed, avoid the snares of the Muses. Yet, if he escaped the fate of Otway and Lee, it was not because Oxford and Cambridge had no part in him, but because he had independent means to which his father's death gave him early access, and because, instead of the rough days of Charles or the rougher ones of "Grub Street," the palmy time of Anne and the earliest George fell to his lot. He was five-and-twenty when his first play, *The Ambitious Stepmother*, appeared, and he followed it up with *Tamerlane* (a glorification of "The Deliverer," for Rowe was a Whig), 1702, and *The Fair Penitent*, 1703. *Jane Shore*, which had been

[1] *Works*, 2 vols. London, 1721. [2] *Works* (new ed.), 2 vols. London, 1792.

preceded by others, appeared in 1714. Rowe was made Poet-Laureate at the accession of George I., and as Surveyor of London Customs was nearer to Chaucer than in his verse. He died in 1718. Pope said he had no heart; others speak well enough of him.

Johnson's description of Rowe's plays admits the absence in them of "any deep search into nature, any accurate discriminations of kindred qualities, or nice display of passion in its progress. All is general and refined. But his reputation comes from the reasonableness of some of his scenes, the elegance of his diction, and the suavity of his verse." These charms have palled. Lothario, the bad hero of *The Fair Penitent*, has given a type-name to literature, but this is Rowe's securest hold on remembrance. The play is a flat rehandling of Massinger's *Fatal Dowry*. Rowe, who actually edited Shakespeare, himself regarded *Jane Shore* as a Shakespearian imitation, and it is not so difficult as some have thought to see why he thought it so; but it is merely "confectioner's Gothic." The other tragedies, including *Ulysses*, 1706, *The Royal Convert*, 1708, and *Lady Jane Grey*, 1715, exhibit varying forms of frigidity; and his one comedy, *The Biter*, is extremely weak. Congreve's only tragedy is more often consulted to see the context of that which Johnson praised so highly than for any other reason. Few need go farther. Southerne's two masterpieces, *The Fatal Marriage* (1694) and *Oroonoko* (1696), are perhaps more unknown still, despite the traditional fame of great actresses in Isabella and Imoinda, the constant references in contemporary and rather later literature to both, and the jokes made on the unlucky second title of *The Fatal Marriage*. They have much less elegance of diction than the work of either Rowe or Congreve, but much greater tragic quality; being, in fact, Otway a little further prosed.

The *Appius and Virginia* of John Dennis, the critic; the *Distressed Mother* of Addison's friend Philips; the *Phaedra and Hippolytus* of his other friend, "Rag" Smith, owe such shadowy repute as they have to accident, and in the two latter cases to Addison's not unamiable habit of steadily puffing his friends. None of them, nor any tragedy written for generations afterwards for the stage, has real merit.[1]

[1] A dramatic growth of this time, the Opera, derived partly from the Masque, partly from the "entertainments" of Davenant, deserves notice. Dryden, here as usual, gave remarkable examples of it—*Albion and Albanius* (1685) and *King Arthur* (1691)—while most of his contemporaries down to D'Urfey affected it more or less. By degrees the serious and "heroic" Opera gave place, in the eighteenth century more particularly, to the comic, the partialities of Rich the manager, and the immense success of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, helping this determination not a little. The type produced, or gave a home to, some excellent songs, but was otherwise not of much literary moment.

CHAPTER III

THE AGE OF DRYDEN—PROSE

Tendency of Restoration prose—Its pioneers—Cowley's prose—Dryden—Temple—Tillotson—Halifax—Sprat—The Royal Society and style—Bunyan—His four chief things—The *English Rogue*—Thomas Burnet—Glanvill—The Diarists—Evelyn—Pepys—Roger North—Minors—Locke—Degradation of style at the close of the century—L'Estrange—Collier—Tom Brown—Dunton.

In the last two chapters the tone of the history has had to be too often apologetic. In poetry nothing but Dryden's own work and a few songs by others was added to our really precious possessions; in drama the best tragedies have to be praised by allowance; and though the best comedies need none in point of wit—and, indeed, in that respect occupy a position unsurpassed and hardly approached—they are far from invulnerable in point of construction, and absolutely at the mercy of their critics in tone, temper, and even presentation of nature.

In the third department, that of prose-writing, the age can hold its head much higher. It is true that, here also, we cannot give it that absolute supremacy which some other periods, in this or that department, may claim. We cannot say that its prose is in all ways and for all purposes the best prose; we may and must admit a regretful looking back to the prose of Browne and Milton, or a consolatory looking forward to the prose of Shelley and Landor; we must confess that here as everywhere the fall of the poetic spirit, the neap of inspiration, the preference of the merely practical and the merely prosaic, is apparent. But there is to be set against these things a great practical achievement. Until 1660 it cannot be seriously maintained that England possessed, or ever had possessed, a prose style suited for those miscellaneous and average purposes which, after all, prose is chiefly meant to subserve. Of the style of no earlier English writer except Hooker can it be said that it is even conceivably applicable at once to plain narrative, to argumentative exposition, to the handling of practical business. We only

Tendency of Restoration prose.

know it in the second of these functions, and, admirable as it is there, we cannot quite tell how it might have adapted itself to the others. Of all other styles we can say positively that for this or that or the other function of general prose they were very plainly unfitted. Until Ascham, the language was not fully stored with words, not fully furnished with syntactic practice. The plain Elizabethan styles were too classical and not elegant enough; the elaborate Elizabethan style could never have got a plain tale told plainly. The stately pregnancy of Bacon, the labyrinthine windings of the *Anatomy*, the quips of Fuller, the dreamy harmonies of Browne, could never have been adapted to novel-writing, to scientific exposition, to historical, political, and philosophical writing without rhetoric. And of all such styles it remained fatally true that when they were not very good they were pretty sure to be very bad.

There are, here as elsewhere, the usual disputes over the exact initiation of the change, and here as elsewhere the old caution that "accuracy must not be expected" is the true one. The manifesto of the change is no doubt an often-quoted passage [1] in Bishop (not yet Bishop) Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* (1667). But the change itself is manifest in the work of a group of men — Dryden, Tillotson, Temple, Halifax — who were Sprat's elders by five or six years. And from these it has been until lately customary to single out Tillotson, partly on the authority of a by no means decisive, and not certainly authentic, statement of Dryden's to Congreve that he had been influenced by Tillotson, partly from the fact that Tillotson, the first Whig divine of importance, and a great apostle of toleration, common sense, and other eighteenth-century catchwords, or (if we may coin a much-needed term) catch-*things*, was popular with Addison and the Queen Anne men generally. But we have examples of Dryden's prose at a time when it is next to impossible that he could have been influenced by Tillotson; the change is evident in the work of Cowley and others earlier still; and on the whole it is far safer and far more philosophical to take it as, like other literary evolutions or revolutions, a "flying spirit on the driven air," generally diffused and felt by many if not by all, rather than as a deliberately caused product of this or that person's idiosyncrasy, or study, or simple desire of innovation.

Its pioneers.

Cowley has just been mentioned, and his case is a notable one. His small handful of extremely pleasant *Essays* display many of the characteristics of the new prose, but it is most noteworthy that they seem to date from the close of his life and after the Restoration. In his most brilliant piece, the *Discourse*

Cowley's prose.

[1] It may be found in Sir H. Craik's *English Prose Specimens*, iii. 271.

concerning Oliver Cromwell (1661), old and new jostle each other in a fashion almost startling, and the colour, form, and fire of the sinister angel who defends the Protector contrast with the almost eighteenth-century correctness of some passages. As in verse, Cowley is the Janus of the time, but his forward face is that which is here the most noticeable.

What is certain is that Dryden himself again heads this list as easily as he does the others, and with the same masterly, unobtrusive, but far-reaching craftsmanship. The immediate stimulus to prose composition in his case was the interest which he felt in dramatic criticism; and the immediate models (for, as we have seen, he always took a model if he could) were Corneille's prose *examens* of his printed plays. But somewhere about 1665 he seems to have begun, and while absent from London at his father-in-law's seat at Charlton to have finished, a much more important thing than any of these, the famous *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*,[1] which has been more than once mentioned, and the cardinal position of which in English literary history has been more and more clearly recognised. For it is not only the manifesto of heroic plays, not only an extremely subtle and competent exposition of divers views as to the different kinds of drama, not even only a declaration, less one-sided than those which were afterwards to be made by the century that followed, of the "correct" notion of poetry, and of literature generally; it is a model of the new prose, newer even than Cowley's, and removed almost by centuries from the style of such still living men as Browne and Milton. It contains, besides remarks on Fletcher and Jonson of only less excellence, that magnificent criticism which by itself sets Dryden almost at the head, in place as in time, of modern English critics, and vindicates England once for all from the silly charge of having been taught by foreigners to admire Shakespeare. Moreover, to complete the value of the thing, we have at least three separate editions of it, which Dryden seems to have carefully superintended at different times of his life, and which allow us to see the gradual progress of the movement that he himself directed. In the earliest form there are not a few vernacularities which—by no means always for the better, but always in the same direction of correctness, elegance, approximation to a certain general form of prose-writing—are altered in the later. One of the most noteworthy of these is the alteration of the old English idiomatic position of the preposition at the end of the sentence—"Such arguments as the fourth act of *Pompey* will furnish me with," to "those with which the, etc., will furnish me"; "writ" becomes "written"; a word occurring too soon

Dryden.

[1] Now accessible separately in several editions, as well as in Prof. Ker's *Dryden's Essays* (Oxford, 1900).

after previous use of it is changed for another; colloquialisms grow fewer; the grammar throughout is corrected and straightened. These things are interesting not only because they show the direction of the general literary current, but also as a protest against that exaggeration and degradation of the plain style itself which, as we shall see, set in during the later years of Dryden's own life, and necessitated the further "correctness" of Addison and Swift.

Dryden's remaining prose works are very considerable, but except his translations (mostly hack-work in the Roman Catholic or Royalist interest) they almost entirely take the form of essays, and no doubt powerfully influenced the general taste for that class of composition. The last—the Preface to the *Fables*—is almost as much the capital example of his style in prose as the Fables themselves are of his style in verse. And there is no doubt that for strictly prosaic purposes this style is one of the most admirable in English—correct, but not in the least thin or tame; with a vocabulary itself almost daringly enriched from foreign tongues, and seldom hesitating at an archaism or a colloquialism when necessary, but thoroughly organised and "in hand"; of extraordinary ease without either over-facility or slipshodness; forcible without the slightest effort, eloquent without declamation, graceful yet thoroughly manly. That there are purposes for which it would not suffice, charms which it does not possess, atmospheres which it cannot give, is all perfectly true. But Dryden does not pretend to give us these things: he gives us what he has, and we can go elsewhere for what he has not. Meanwhile the purposes for which his own style is suited are perhaps more numerous, and the purposes for which it is distinctly unsuited fewer, than in the case of any other English prose-writer, save only Southey.

Temple.

Sir William Temple was a slightly older man than Dryden, having been born in 1628. He was a native of London, but had connections with Ireland, where his father was Master of the Rolls. He was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and fell in love early with Dorothy Osborne, daughter of the Royalist governor of Guernsey, who wrote him some of the most charming letters in English, and whom he afterwards married, though after much opposition, for his own party, or rather his father's, was the Parliamentary. After the Restoration he fell into political, especially diplomatic employment, was sent to Munster, negotiated the Triple Alliance, and did much other work. In the later years of Charles he was tried in home politics, but was less fortunate, being perhaps too squeamish and certainly too timid. For the last twenty years of his life, which ended unhappily in 1699 (his wife and son having died before him, the latter in painful and disgraceful circumstances),

he lived in retirement at Sheen and Moor Park in Surrey, acting sometimes as the adviser, though never as the minister, of William of Orange, harbouring Swift and "Stella," mixing, not too happily for himself, in the "Ancient and Modern" dispute, and gardening. Temple's works[1] are mainly occasional, and the best of them are letters and essays; for he, like all his fellows, shows the strong bent of the time towards the essay form. His style, at its best extremely engaging, manifests the new form—plain, but carefully balanced and polished. From the agreeable nature of the subjects, and the air of gentlemanly but not too patronising condescension which it displays, it exercised great influence on a generation which thoroughly respected "quality." Once (in the thousand-times-quoted close of his Essay on Poetry) Temple went higher than Dryden, higher than any one of his own school, in developing the music of prose; in the context of this and in many other places he goes very high.

Tillotson.

John Tillotson[2] was a Yorkshire man, the son of a violently Protestant clothier, and was born in 1630. He was educated at Clare Hall, Cambridge, took orders, and after the Restoration appeared as a Presbyterian at the Savoy Conference, but was no extremist and did not "go out." As preacher of Lincoln's Inn, prebendary of St. Paul's, and then Dean of it, he acquired a great reputation for eloquence as well as for moderate liberalism—as we should now call it—in politics and theology. But he was highly respected by all parties during the reigns of Charles and James, and he forfeited this respect with the Tories, not by his Whiggery, but by accepting Sancroft's archbishopric despite, it would appear, his own better reason and conscience. He died in 1694. It was mainly because the older style, in the hands of South, Barrow, and other great preachers, kept hold of the pulpit longer than of other departments of prose, that Tillotson acquired his reputation for style. Those who go to him now for that quality will probably be a good deal disappointed. He is very fairly clear and easy; but he has neither the strength and variety of Dryden, nor the music of Temple, nor the crisp elegance of Halifax.

Halifax.

With respect to the last named it is proper to observe that the work,[3] in virtue of which he appears here, though there is no reasonable doubt of his authorship of it, is not attributed to him on certain documentary evidence. George Savile, who was born of an old Yorkshire family in 1633, and succeeded to a baronetcy at eight years old, became a member of Parliament at the Restoration. He received a peerage as Lord Savile and Viscount

[1] 4 vols. London, 1757. [2] *Works*, 10 vols. London, 1820.
[3] *Miscellanies* (London, 1704); *Works*, ed. Raleigh, Oxford, 1912.

Halifax eight years later, was a great opponent of Shaftesbury and supporter (though in a moderate or "trimming" fashion) of the Crown, and was successively promoted to be Earl and Marquess. In the reign of James II. he was strongly in opposition, and held important positions in the interim government and in William's first ministry, but retired and died in 1695 as a private person. Halifax's political importance is known to all readers of Macaulay, and he is traditionally reputed as one of the greatest parliamentary speakers of his own, or any, time. But his literary fame rests upon a little volume of *Miscellanies* containing, besides *Advice to a Daughter* and some minor things, four political tracts which had been issued between 1680 and 1690, entitled respectively *The Character of a Trimmer*, *Letter to a Dissenter*, *The Anatomy of an Equivalent*, and *Cautions for the Choice of a Parliament-man*. Of these the first had been earlier attributed to Sir William Coventry, and the second to Sir William Temple; but the style of the whole is extremely homogeneous and quite different from anything of Temple's, while, published as the *Miscellanies* were within a decade of Halifax's death, it seems extremely improbable that the attribution, if incorrect, would not have been challenged.

They are all exceedingly important documents, showing first that inclination to the essay—to the short, forcible, not inelegant, and yet first of all popular, treatment of manageably limited subjects, which was such a feature of the time; and secondly, the progress which was being made in the elaboration of a style suitable to such treatment in the special department of politics. It may be observed, from a comparison of many instances, that irony is an almost inseparable accompaniment and ornament of the plainer styles. For it not only does not require, but is positively repugnant to, flowing and florid periods, involved constructions, and the like, and it gives the salt and savour of which the plain style is in especial need. Accordingly there is irony in Cowley, and plenty of it in Dryden. But Halifax's variety is different from that of either of his forerunners—drier, more antithetic with a quiet antithesis, more suggestive of a "word to the wise." Not that Halifax by any means scorns a flight now and then—there is in the *Character of a Trimmer* a passage on Truth beyond doubt suggested by the famous text on that subject in the *Areopagitica* (which Halifax was almost or quite old enough to have read at the time of its publication), and very well worth comparing with it. But these things are not his staple; that is the statement of the case to the plain man in a plain way, yet with such a shrewdness and pungency as may give satisfaction to those whose wits, though plain, are not absolutely sluggish. For political purposes such a style is the most valuable of all, and Halifax, beyond

all doubt, showed the way to the greater but fiercer and less equable genius of Swift.

Sprat.

Thomas Sprat, as was observed above, is more noticeable for the distinctness with which he puts the new demand than for any particular dexterity that he shows in following it. He was a Devonshire man, born in 1636, and went to Wadham College, Oxford, where the example of the Warden Wilkins may have taught him the excellency of making the best of both parties. He wrote a Pindaric Ode in honour of Cromwell's death, but when the Restoration came he promptly took orders and became chaplain to Buckingham, his duties in that function being traditionally supposed to have included participation in *The Rehearsal*. Science being fashionable, he became a man of science, and in 1667 published his History (it was then a short one) of the Royal Society, taking in that respect rather the views of Dryden, whom he was libelling, than of Butler, who joined in the libel. He was a great friend of Cowley, whose life he wrote in Latin and English, made a smart reply to a certain Sorbière, a Frenchman who had travelled in England, and became Canon of Windsor in 1680, and Bishop of Rochester in 1684. His record under James was not too creditable, but, very luckily for him, he was made the object under William of a ridiculous charge of plotting by two professional perjurers, and reaped a good deal of credit from his manner of clearing himself. He died in 1713.

The Royal Society and style.

Sprat no doubt heartily sympathised with, as he most ingeniously expressed, the public demand for a popularised style. He represents the Royal Society as "most solicitous against the luxury and redundance of speech," as "beholding with indignation how many mists and uncertainties these specious tropes and figures have brought on our knowledge." He protests against "this vicious abundance of phrase, this trick of metaphors, this volubility of tongue." He calls it a "beautiful deceit," and declares that the Society has "a constant resolution to reject all the amplifications and digressions of style." They have, he says, exacted from all their members "a close, naked, natural way of speaking—positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can, and preferring the language of artisans, countrymen, and merchants before that of wits or scholars." And he practises what he preaches, though without forgetting scholarship. But we shall see, as we survey the progress of prose letters during the last forty years of the seventeenth century, that by degrees this language of artisans, countrymen, and merchants was very near swamping literary English altogether, and that it had, again and again, in ways as different as those of

Addison and Swift, of Johnson, Burke, and Gibbon, to be lifted bodily out of its "naked natural way" lest it should display all the bareness and ugliness of savagery.

At such a period almost all writers are interesting to the historical student of literature, because we look to see how the change expresses itself in them. And this particular period is more than usually so, because a good deal of the unconquerable individuality of the earlier part of the century survives in it, and prevents monotony. After Addison everybody tries to write like Addison; after Johnson almost everybody tries to write like Johnson. But after Dryden everybody does not yet try to write like Dryden; the common influence is upon them, but they express it in different ways.

In perhaps the very greatest prose-writer of the time, next to Dryden himself, the particular epoch-tendency shows itself but partially, and in ways socially differentiated. Like Latimer, like Cobbett, his two chief analogues in English prose-writing, John Bunyan[1] is less of his time in purely literary respects than of himself. Had there been no Puritanism he would have been different, or perhaps would have been nothing at all, as Latimer might have been had there been no Reformation, and Cobbett had there been no Reform, in their respective airs. But like them he would always have been chiefly himself. He was born at Elstow in Bedfordshire in the year 1628, observing the date, be it noticed—the late twenties and early thirties—of all these men. He certainly served in the wars of Rebellion, but whether as a rebel or a loyalist cannot be made out. He was "converted," married early, and began, in the time of the Commonwealth, to write against the Quakers. After the Restoration he was arrested for unlicensed preaching, and wrote a good deal. He had license for a time, but was again arrested, and is said then to have written the *Pilgrim's Progress*, the first part of which was published in 1678. In the last years of his life he was not much molested, and died in 1688. His work is very voluminous, but that part of it which belongs to literature is chiefly composed of his masterpiece, which was completed in 1684, of the *Holy War* (1682), of the *Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), and perhaps of the earlier *Grace Abounding* (1660). Bunyan.

Bunyan had no classical education, and it is improbable that he read at all in the work of any of his famous prose contemporaries. But he was a member of the first generation which had the unmatched English of the Authorised Version by heart, he could supply whatever was wanting there by his knowledge of the vernacular, and he had

[1] Ed. Offor, 3 vols. London, *n.d.*

literary fire enough in him to have played a great part in any age, merely by adapting his genius to the current literary forms. He was a born novelist, but the prose novel was not in any honour at the time of his life, nor for many years after his death, and if he wrote it, it was because he must. And he could have been an admirable dramatist, indeed his stories are the nearest to the drama of all the great things of the kind in English. He is a great autobiographer; he might have written great histories and still greater accounts of discovery of countries. He is not a great reasoner, though no ill one on his premises and in his method; nor (being born when he was) a great poet. But he could see everything that was within the range of his sight, and tell what he saw infallibly; he had an admirable wit, and one of the greatest gifts of phrase—of picking up the right word or the right half-dozen words—that man has ever had.

In the four great books above selected, as well as more or less in all his work, Bunyan exhibits these gifts variously. *Grace Abounding* has the interest of autobiography, and though there can be no doubt that the inveterate Puritan habit of pious exaggeration in describing a man's own shortcomings is there, yet it is made compatible with astonishing literary perfection. In the seventeenth century this passionate humility (or as some unkind judges have taken it, this form of spiritual pride which insists on being, if a sinner at all, the chief of sinners) meets us at every turn, and it has been sufficiently common since. But it is exceedingly rare to find it presented with such unconscious yet complete and Shakespearian artistry.

His four chief things.

The *Holy War* is a much more ambitious composition, though indeed ambition is an incorrect word, for that quality is quite absent from Bunyan. But while in *Grace Abounding* there is no deliberate literary form, the personal confession and the religious purpose not obliging the author to select any, here the important and difficult form of the allegorical romance is deliberately attempted. As usual, Bunyan's direct models here, and still more in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, have been hunted after with more zeal than wisdom. He may have had such; the *Progress* is certainly very close to Deguileville[1] (see p. 136) in parts. The universal fondness for allegory in mediæval times had been nowhere stronger than in England. The Renaissance, as the *Faërie Queene* shows, had only changed the manner, not the nature, of the tendency, and the omnipotence of the Bible among Bunyan's class at this time had intensified it yet further. But in the *Holy War* Bunyan has not co-ordinated his religious and

[1] See *The Ancient Poem of Guillaume de Guileville* (the "de" should be doubled), ed. N. Hill and others, London, 1858; and *supra*, p. 160.

literary senses as he has in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and he probably did not intend to do so. The piece is, like everything of his, faultlessly written in its own style, and abounds with fine passages. But the subject is both too vast and too vague for the particular treatment, and except for the gusto with which the old soldier tells of the military operations against Mansoul, the personal note is wanting, or at best emerges fitfully.

Although it may seem strange that the astonishing literary excellence of the *Life and Death of Mr. Badman* should have ever escaped any competent critic, yet it may be doubted whether many people knew it till the late Mr. Froude took the opportunity of doing justice to it.[1] It is a not very long dialogue between Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive, divided into chapters, and recounting the ungodly but successful life of a hero who is the very opposite of Christian. It has been most unnecessarily and unreasonably regarded as a sort of third part by contrast of the *Progress* (which would argue an artistic sense in Bunyan as weak as we know his to have been strong), and as, in part at least, a second autobiographical fiction—which refutes itself. But to foist "problems" into a story of such perfect clearness is quite unpardonable. The style is perhaps Bunyan's best—less vivid than that of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, but with even more of the special excellences of prose. Although Mr. Badman deserves his name with almost superhuman thoroughness, yet Bunyan entirely escapes sheer exaggeration, and even resists the temptation to end with a lurid deathbed. Nay, though his sense of poetical and moral justice will not let him represent Badman as prosperous to the very end, yet he does not insist overmuch on worldly retribution. Short as it is, the piece is abundantly diversified with episodes and ornament—that story of "old Tod," told in twenty lines, and told perfectly, which Mr. Browning has characteristically amplified and exaggerated into "Ned Bratts," being only one of them. There are very strong suggestions of Thackeray (who had pretty certainly read it) in *Mr. Badman*, and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that, this once printed, the English Novel in its most characteristic form, as opposed to the Romance, was founded. The little book itself is indeed rather the *scenario* in dialogue of such a novel than the novel itself, but all the essentials are there. From Bunyan to Defoe (who must have known his predecessor well) there is only a slight development of method, with a considerable drop in style; from Bunyan here to Richardson and Fielding the advance is very much slighter than it looks.

The allegorical form and the strongly religious purport of the

[1] In his monograph on Bunyan for the "English Men of Letters" Series.

Pilgrim's Progress itself have made some demur to its being ranked as certainly a link, and perhaps the very original link, starting the chain of the greater English novel; but this seems to be a somewhat unnecessary scruple. A religious novel is still a novel, and though allegory is an old form of fiction, and the novel proper a comparatively new one, we must not rule out allegories as such from the latter class.

Indeed, if, discarding arbitrary axioms, we confine ourselves to the real qualities of the novel, we shall find it very hard to discover one which is not eminently present in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. It has a sufficient and regular plot in each of its parts, the two being duly connected—a plot rather of the continuous or straight-line than of the interwoven or circular order, but still amply sufficient. The action and interest of this plot are quite lavishly supported by character; indeed, the *Pilgrim's Progress* is the first prose work of fiction in which this all-powerful tool, which had hitherto been chiefly used by the dramatist, and to a less intense, but more extensive, degree by the poet, was applied. And Bunyan, with a bound, came very near perfection in it. There is hardly a trace (except in characters like Evangelist, where it is proper) of the misty generality which we find in the *Holy War*. Everybody—from main characters like Christian and Greatheart and Mercy to mere sketches like Atheist and By-ends and Brisk, and the delectable person who describes the party at "Madam Wanton's," where they "were as merry as the maids"—is alive. The description and the dialogue are used to further the narrative, in the precise way in which novel differs from drama—the description being given by the author, not by the characters or the stage directions—and are mixed and tempered with an art only inferior to that shown in the projection of character which they help. If we are told that the *Pilgrim's Progress* is not a novel, it will be proper to ask what *is* a novel, that having obtained an admitted example we may compare it with Bunyan's work.

The *Pilgrim's Progress* has long been, and it may be hoped will always be, well enough known in England. But for something like four generations after its first appearance, its popularity, though always great, was, so to speak, subterranean and almost contraband. It is probable that even when it was most sniffed at by academic criticism, it was brought by means of nursemaids to the knowledge of children. But it was not till quite the end of the eighteenth century, or even the beginning of the nineteenth, that it was made free of the study as it had long been of the cottage and the nursery. Orthodoxy objected to Bunyan's dissent; dissent to his literary and artistic gifts; latitudinarians to his religious fervour; the somewhat

priggish refinement of Addisonian and Popian etiquette to his vernacular language and his popular atmosphere; scholars to his supposed want of education. And so the greatest prose-book of the late seventeenth century in English had, for nearly a hundred and fifty years, the curious fate of constantly exercising influence without ever achieving praise, or even notice, from those whose business it was to give both. A curious fate certainly, but not an unenviable.

The reluctance to acknowledge the place of Bunyan in the history of the novel has perhaps partly accounted for the undue importance sometimes attached to work so infinitely inferior, not merely in moral respectability but in literary value, to his as that of Richard Head, the author of the *English Rogue*.[1] This book does possess a certain historical value. It forms a definite link between the pamphlet-novels of the Elizabethan time in the wide sense and (through the novelettes of Afra Behn) the work of Defoe. It represents the first elaborate attempt to transplant the Spanish picaresque novel, and such French imitations of it as Sorel's *Francion*, into English; and it is also interesting as embodying the attractions of representation of foreign countries and manners with those of the delineation of manners at home. It shows further that extremely strong vernacular and popular, not to say vulgar, element which we have had, and shall have, to notice so often in this particular period. But it has hardly any intrinsic merit; and, if it had not followed the moral license of its originals, it may be questioned whether it would have had many readers or any panegyrists. For its want of decency is almost the only feature which takes it out of the commonplace; it hardly attempts plot, unless the rudimentary device of making the hero occasionally meet with persons he has met before may be dignified by that name; it has no merits of dialogue or description, and it is entirely wanting in the virtue which, as we have seen, Bunyan possesses in so eminent a degree—the virtue of character-drawing.

The *English Rogue*.

Thomas Burnet and Joseph Glanvill are the chief exponents of the gorgeous style in prose, who were born, later than Dryden himself, in the seventeenth century. Burnet (who must be very carefully distinguished from his namesake Gilbert) was a Yorkshire man, and his birth-year was 1635. He was educated at Northallerton Grammar School and at Clare Hall, Cambridge, whence he moved to Christ's and became Fellow of that college in 1657. He took his share of University work, but also travelled much abroad as a private tutor, and in 1685

Thomas Burnet.

[1] 4 vols. London, 1665, *sq.* Reprinted recently, London, *n.d.* Head, who was a person of some education, and a copious bookseller's hack, is responsible only for the first part of it.

he became Master of the Charterhouse. He had already published in Latin (1680) and English (1684) his *Theoria Sacra*, with its sequel the *De Conflagratione*, and he did little else in literature, though he did not die till 1715. His position at the Charterhouse gave him the opportunity, which he duly took, of resisting James II.'s attack on the Church. Burnet's book [1] is a fanciful explanation of cosmogony and cosmolysis, in which the Deluge is the great event in the past and the final conflagration the great event of the future. From this point of view it is chiefly interesting as an attempt to combine the nascent interest in physical science with the expiring tendency to imaginative romance. Something of the same mixture appears in the manner, for there are touches of the vernacularity, and even the meanness, which was invading style. But on the whole the older magnificence prevails, and Burnet has a just, though probably rather a vague, repute as commanding real eloquence of description, marred at times by a tawdriness which reminds us that we are in the half-century of Lee not in that of Shakespeare, but showing in prose not a little of the redeeming splendour which Lee shows in verse.

Glanvill.

Glanvill, whom the echoing magnificence of a sentence from him, prefixed to Poe's *Ligeia*, may have made known to many more than have read him in his originals, was born at Plymouth in 1636, went to Oxford in 1652, took orders at the Restoration, became Vicar of Frome, F.R.S., and Prebendary of Worcester, and died in 1680. His *Scepsis Scientifica*,[2] an extended edition of the earlier *Vanity of Dogmatising* (1661), appeared in 1665; *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, a defence of belief in witches, in 1666; and *Essays* in 1678. Glanvill is a weaker and less poetical Browne, upon whom it is probably not wrong to suspect that he modelled himself. He has, as a rule, neither the power nor the music of Sir Thomas, but sometimes he comes not too far off.

The Diarists.

One of the most remarkable divisions of prose at the time is that supplied by the Diarists and Memoir-writers, of whom Samuel Pepys occupies a position unparalleled in English, if not in any tongue, with Evelyn and Roger North for considerable seconds, and no small number of other writers—Sir John Reresby, Abraham de la Pryme, the somewhat earlier Mrs. Hutchinson, Lady Fanshawe (indeed, the letter-writers proper might be here included), and others to follow. But Pepys, Evelyn, and North are those who have hold on history.

The two first were friends, but Evelyn, far less distinctly original as a writer, was the elder in years and by far the higher in social position. He was born at the family seat of Wotton, in Surrey (of which, with

[1] 7th edition, 2 vols. London, 1759.
[2] Edited by John Owen, London, 1885.

other property at Sayes Court, Deptford, he was afterwards to be possessor), in 1620, went to school at Lewes, and to college at Balliol, but was just young enough to escape actual participation in the Civil War. He was a consistent Royalist, and married the daughter of a still stronger one, Sir Richard Browne. But Evelyn was no Quixote, and was not molested during the Commonwealth. Both at that time and afterwards he devoted himself to gardening and arboriculture (of which his well-known, if not now much read, *Sylva* was the outcome), physical science (he was an early member of the Royal Society), and a good many other matters. He was a fervent Anglican and faithful to monarchical principles, though the dissoluteness of the Restoration gave him no small grief. He was nearly eighty-seven when he died in 1706, and his work, published and unpublished, was very large. But even the *Sylva* has long ceased to be read, and the books most likely to keep his name in remembrance, his *Diary*[1] and his *Memoir*[2] of Margaret Blagge (Mrs. Godolphin), were not published till more than a century after his death. Evelyn.

The interest of these arises chiefly from their matter. In them and in all his work Evelyn's style is that of a thoroughly cultivated gentleman who, on the one hand, has had the full education of his time, and on the other is familiar with the language of its best society. But he has little idiosyncrasy of composition or expression. He has neither the splendour of the old style nor the precision and telling point of the new. But in the little book giving the life and letters of Margaret Blagge (the first wife of Godolphin, the Lord Treasurer to be, who passed unscathed through the contaminations of Whitehall, where she was a maid of honour, and died in the prime of her youth and beauty), a half-platonic, half-paternal affection has suffused warmth and colour over Evelyn's usually rather tepid and neutral fashion of writing. And the *Diary*, though there are many more amusing books of the kind, is justly famous for the fulness, variety, and fidelity of its records, while, not very rarely, in such passages as the well-known account of the Great Fire, and the still better known one of Whitehall just before the death of Charles II., the subject once more rouses the writer to real strength and effect. But even then he is hardly individual.

There is no more individual writer in English than Samuel Pepys, his friend, though Evelyn patronised Pepys, as Pepys patronised Dryden. He was born in 1633, of a family settled in the district of Cambridge and Huntingdon, and, as was not uncommon in the seventeenth century, touching the peerage Pepys.

[1] Ed. Bray, 2 vols. 4to (2nd ed. 1819), and in divers forms since.
[2] First published by Samuel Wilberforce, and reprinted since.

and the landed gentry on one side, retail town trade and the lower middle class on the other. His connection with Montague, afterwards Earl of Sandwich, was the foundation of Pepys's fortunes, which, after being very humble before the Restoration, were mightily bettered by his appointment to the post of Clerk of the Acts of the Navy. He was Secretary of the Admiralty later, and Member of Parliament; and though he lost his positions, once at the Popish Plot time and finally at the Revolution, he always enjoyed a great reputation as a scholar, virtuoso, and expert in matters naval. In fact, though he was not much (he was somewhat) superior to the loose ideas of his time as to what was and what was not malversation of public money, Pepys was far more diligent, able, and patriotic than most of his fellows. He seems to have been in more than conventional phrase "universally respected" up to his death in 1703. He left to his college, Magdalene, at Cambridge (his school was St. Paul's), an invaluable collection of books, including ballads and old MSS., of which he was one of the earliest collectors; and his *Memoirs relating to the State of the Navy* (1690) was and is a very meritorious production. Even his letters, of which we have considerable numbers,[1] though as yet no complete printed collection, present him in no other light than that of a man of business with rather versatile tastes for music, science, and (in part) literature, but of no special idiosyncrasy either of genius or character.

In 1825, however, Lord Braybrooke, whose family was connected hereditarily with Magdalene, published in part a *Diary*[2] which Pepys had included in his bequest to that society. It had been kept in cypher by the author for about ten years from a period just before the Restoration, till anxiety about the state of his eyes broke it off, and probably the death of his wife checked its resumption. She was Elizabeth St. Michel, a pretty girl and of gentle French extraction, but penniless, ill-educated, apparently (though it must be admitted she was sorely tried) of no very sweet disposition, frivolous, and unrefined. They had made a boy-and-girl marriage, and, though a most unfaithful husband, he seems to have been, with perhaps one interval, never quite out of love with her. The *Diary* was published by Lord Braybrooke with very large omissions; fifty years afterwards part of these were supplied; and twenty years later again the whole, with some verbal blanks, *pudoris causa*, was issued. The successive

[1] Chiefly to be found in *Life, Journals, and Correspondence of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Smith, 2 vols. London, 1841, which also contains the Tangier Diary. By some mischance or misconduct the bulk of the letters did not reach Magdalene, and are scattered, while many, no doubt, are lost.

[2] The latest and completest (but still not quite complete) edition is that of Mr. H. B. Wheatley, London, 1893-99, 8 vols. of text, with a 9th of index and a 10th of *Pepysiana*.

revelations have considerably blackened Pepys's character, and have increased the surprise of those who can afford any surprise at a constantly renewed phenomenon, that he should have not merely written but preserved, and with extraordinary precautions insured the preservation of, the document. But they have rather increased than lessened the estimate of his peculiar genius. In the place of, or rather inside of, the decorous, diligent official and virtuoso who was for forty years respected by the scrupulous Evelyn, and who majestically congratulates Dryden on the comfort afforded to Pepys by his Good Parson, "after the sight of so many lewd originals," we have an almost entirely different person. The interest in some literature, in science, in music, in art, remains; the diligence is seen to have been by no means merely affected; the shrewd business-sense, and even the determination that, though Pepys shall be well paid for serving the King, yet the King shall not be ill served, remain. But likewise many strange new things appear. We find a man insatiable of scandal, petty pleasures, frivolities of dress, and the like; intensely selfish and sometimes even brutal, though good-natured in the main; the arrantest of snobs; stingy to his wife and lavish to himself; a thorough libertine, and resorting to the specially bad trick of using his official position to gratify his libertinage; sometimes almost cowardly, constantly jealous, petty in every way.

Yet we never dislike Pepys, and we seldom despise him. Nor is this merely due to the fact that every rational person remembers and allows for the bearing of a certain text about casting the first stone. It is due first to the fact that Pepys is intensely human; secondly to the fact that within his limits (and they are many and sharply drawn, so that he could not like Shakespeare, could not like Butler, could appreciate neither poetry nor humour at the best of either) he was intensely sensitive to impressions; most of all to the fact that, for whatsoever reason—perhaps because of the utter absence of restraint and respect of persons—he can express these impressions as no one else has done. The *Diary* deals literally with the entire occupations of a busy life for nearly ten years. Nothing is too small, nothing too mean, hardly anything even too disgusting, for Pepys to record; he does not know what tedium means, and yet—an almost unique instance—he never produces it. His innumerable morning draughts and evening suppers; the oaths which at times interfered with them; the books which he so diligently bought, if he did not always taste them; his more or less unlawful amusements; his friendships; his enmities; his very official business—all these things and many others acquire in passing under his hands a sort of varnish, or, more properly speaking, a sort of saturation of immortality. It is impossible to define with any accuracy how this is

communicated. Part may be due to the short, stenographic expression necessitated by his cypher, to the constant shock of surprise at his astounding frankness, to the raciness which his observation of the actual fashion of speech of the time imparts. But there is a residuum which cannot be accounted for by any of these things, or by the interest, intrinsic or accidental, of his subjects; and this residuum is genius. About genius the less said the better. To acknowledge it and enjoy it is always the better part of criticism.

Roger North.

The most interesting of the Memoir-writers, next to Pepys and Evelyn—indeed, more interesting, if less important, than the latter—is Roger North, a younger son of a family which made no small show in history and politics during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in England. Roger was born "about" 1650 (for, copious as he is, he neglects dates strangely), and lived till 1733, most of his written work being the fruit of his later years. It consists of *Lives*[1] of himself and his three brothers (the Lord Keeper Guildford, Dr. John North, Master of Trinity, and Sir Dudley, the Turkey merchant), and of the *Examen*,[2] an important Tory vindication of the proceedings of Charles II.'s reign against the incoming Whiggery of the eighteenth century. The *Lives* are the more interesting; but the whole is written in a curious and very piquant style, strangely free from any of the new classicism, but as strangely crossed between the older conceit and the new slang. North is Harrington *plus* L'Estrange; he will write "This was nuts to the old lord," "That flowed in on him like an *orage*," "The Common Pleas thought to have nicked them," with no fear of Dryden earlier and Addison later, and much as his collateral ancestor Sir Thomas would have done. Which, together with the interesting things he has to say, gives him no mean position. He liked painting and yachting as well as the toughest quillets of the old law, and was altogether a character.

Minors.

Many other writers have obtained a more or less secure footing in histories, more or less elaborate, of English literature as representing the prose of this time. The great, but never fully co-ordinated or developed powers of Andrew Marvell showed themselves in his later, and mainly satiric, stage in prose as well as in verse. Algernon Sidney (1620?-83) has received for his literature some of that bounty of praise which in politics has turned a venal partisan into a martyred patriot; but the genius of his family was not entirely lost in him. George Fox (1624-90), the first of Quakers, has been rightly selected as a sort of "prose Bunyan." The platitudinousness of the Honourable Robert Boyle (1626-91), celebrated, or

[1] Ed. Jessopp, 3 vols. London, 1890. [2] 4to, London, 1740.

rather immortalised, by Swift, is an unintentional reduction to the absurd of the qualities which Sprat insisted on as necessary to the scientific man. Anthony [à] Wood (1632-95), author of the great *Athenae Oxonienses*, was a Pepys who bestowed upon his mother University and her notables and notabilia what the diarist devoted to dinner, and supper, and the wives of shipwrights in the Deptford yard, and taverns, and theatres, and the Navy accounts. And Anthony's senior, survivor, friend, but inferior, John Aubrey (1626-97) was still more like Pepys, and has preserved much of such gossip as we have about great and small men of his own time and a little before. Edward Stillingfleet (1635-99) was a strong divine and scholar, with a style inadequate to his learning and his logic. Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715) was a Whig Clarendon, without the genius and the art. The Scots prose of the time is, despite the decadence of Scottish literature, not unworthily represented by Sir George Mackenzie (1636-91), a great lawyer and statesman, an old-fashioned but vivid writer, and, as we know both from Dryden and his own writings, an excellent critic; and by Fletcher of Saltoun (1653-1716), whose personality is embalmed by his saying or quotation about the ballads of a nation; and by his not quite senseless crotchet about enslaving beggars. Of all these it would be interesting, but is impossible, to say more here; but something in detail must be added of John Locke, and a few words about the growth of periodicals and the vulgarisation of style towards the close of the century, especially as shown in L'Estrange, Collier, Dunton, and "the facetious Tom Brown."

Locke.

Locke was born at Wrington in Somerset, under the shadow of the Mendips, in 1632. He too, like South and Dryden, was a pupil of Busby's at Westminster, and, like South, he went to Christ Church. He availed himself of his studentship to settle down there in the study of medicine and philosophy. He lost this quiet haven through his friendship with Shaftesbury, but he had means and was able to live, chiefly abroad, till the Revolution restored him and provided him with divers offices, especially a Commissionership of Trade and Plantations. He had published *Letters on Toleration* before the expulsion of James, but his principal works, the great *Essay on the Human Understanding* and the *Treatise of Government*, appeared just afterwards in 1690, and the *Thoughts on Education* in 1693. He died in 1704.[1]

With the matter of Locke's work, important as it is, we have here little or nothing to do. It concerns us mainly as showing the degradation, the general lowering of thought and ideal, which has so

[1] There is no good complete edition of Locke, though there are several last-century collections. The *Essay* can be found cheaply in Bohn's Library, and with all necessary apparatus in Professor Campbell Fraser's edition.

much to do with the changes of literature at this time. Locke has abundance of common sense; he is not (whatever his followers may have been) irreligious; he is kindly and not ungenerous in tone and sentiment; nor does it appear that he himself desired any violent changes in Church or State. But he is wholly, and in a slightly unpleasant sense, *practical*. If he objects to innate ideas, it is not so much because his acuteness perceives certain obvious difficulties in admitting them as because they are above his range, out of his ken, something that does not come within the almost (not quite) pure sensationalism of his thought. If in the same way he objects to the high-flying theory of hereditary and absolute monarchy, it is not merely because absolute monarchy has been abused, or merely because he sees objection to it, but because it is again "too high" for him, because its poetical and romantic attractions, as well as the logical merits of its theory, which appeal even to a person so little poetical as Hobbes, are quite out of his plane and orbit. Yet again, if he objects to the older and classical education, it is because it is in danger of interfering with business, because it puts flighty notions into men's heads. No very great figure of the age really expresses its banality as does Locke. The eyes of Dryden are still caught by the brave translunary things which all great poets must perceive; the fresh attraction of the then novel mathematical and physical discoveries inflames Barrow earlier and Newton later; there is an intoxication of satire in Butler, an intoxication of God, and of humanity, and of the unseen in Bunyan, a kind of intoxication of physical pleasure and amusement even in Pepys. But Locke is nothing if not sober: he is eminently of such stuff as dreams are *not* made of.

And the style is, once more, the very man. It would be grossly unjust to despise Locke as a writer; his merits of clear apperception and presentation, of exact adjustment of the method of appeal to the person appealed to, the range and fertility of his illustration, the cogency of his attack if the general principles of it are granted, the absence of pretension and quackery—these are things too rare and too good in themselves not to receive due acknowledgment. But it is certainly not wrong to see in him literary (we need say nothing more of his philosophical) influences which, while they may have been valuable at the time as helping to clear away some things once good and great, but now in their decadence, helped to bring about worse things in time to come. To no single man is that obstinate Philistinism of thought and expression, which is the besetting sin of eighteenth-century literature, due so much as to Locke. The dignity, indeed, of his subject, his genuine learning, his modesty, his intellectual acumen kept him from being actually vulgar. But he was the cause of infinite vulgarity in others, and his style of itself incurs

the fatal word. Not merely every spark of imagination, not merely every flight of fancy, but almost every flourish and curvet of rhetoric, humour, sympathy, sense of the double sides of things, are excluded from Locke's handling.

He was, however, saved by his very matter-of-factness, even more than by his possession of scholarship, from the extreme degradations of style which appear in the periodical and controversial writers of the close of the century. The newspaper came slowly into form; but it came, and it necessarily helped to exaggerate this degradation. It had to appeal to society at large, and society at large, both high and low, had the mind to *s'encanailler*. Coarseness ruled from Whitehall to Whitefriars; courtier, citizen, vagabond had alike lost the last glimpse of anything unvulgar. L'Estrange, a Tory, a gentleman, and even something of a scholar, writes mere Billingsgate sometimes, and mere vernacular familiarity always. Jeremy Collier, a very learned man, a sound theologian, and a sincere and formidable defender of morality, has no more dignity in his style than L'Estrange himself. Tom Brown, the University Bohemian, and John Dunton, the middle-class shopkeeper, vie with each other, not indeed in technical impropriety, but in what can only be called *commonness* of expression—in a way of writing which is not merely easy but vulgarly slipshod, not merely vernacular but (once more) vulgar. Some little must be said about each of them, for they are notable people in literary history, which has not always done them justice; but the same taint is upon them all.

Degradation of style at the close of the century.

Sir Roger L'Estrange, the eldest of the group and the highest in position, was born as early as 1616, of the family of the L'Estranges of Hunstanton, in Norfolk, and, like his father Sir Hamon, was a zealous and active Royalist in the Rebellion itself. After the Restoration he maintained his service, but changed his weapon, becoming Gazetteer and Censor of the Press, writing and editing many newspapers, the *Public Intelligencer*, the *Observator*, and so forth, and long surviving the downfall of the Stuarts. He even saw their partial restoration in the person of Anne, for he did not die till 1704, at the age of nearly ninety. Outside periodicals and controversial pamphlets, L'Estrange's work was almost entirely translation, which indeed gave surprisingly large employment to writers at this time, from the highest to the lowest. Josephus, Seneca, Cicero, Quevedo,[1] and Aesop were among the

L'Estrange.

[1] The translation of Quevedo's *Visions* was one of the most popular, and is one of the most characteristic, of L'Estrange's books. Soon after it appeared, and in the hurly-burly of the Dutch in the Medway, on 9th June 1667, Pepys extolled it as "the best [translation] he ever saw," and thought it impossible even to believe that it could be a translation. It reached its tenth edition in 1708. It is lively enough, and not immoral, but coarse almost beyond belief.

motley subjects of his efforts in this kind. L'Estrange had a vigorous intellect and a very ready and deft pen, which wounded his Whig adversaries very sorely, and caused them greatly to cry out. But he did much to introduce the colloquialism which distinguishes all the group, and against which, in the next chapter, we shall find Swift openly protesting, and Addison working by contrary example.

Collier.

Jeremy Collier, though as good a Tory as L'Estrange, was a very different person and a much younger man. He was not born till 1650, was educated at Caius College, Cambridge, and had for a time a living in Suffolk, being subsequently Lecturer at Gray's Inn. He not merely "went out" as a Nonjuror at the Revolution, but was thrown into prison for his Legitimist writings, and all readers of Macaulay know the appearance he made at the execution of Friend and Parkyns. He lived till 1726, doing a great deal of work, including an *Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain* (1708-14); and under Anne he declined good preferment from royalty to principle. His *Essays* (three parts, 1698-1705) are full of vigorous writing and sound morals. But he lives in literature chiefly by his famous *Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage*, published in 1698, and already referred to in the dramatic chapter of this Book. The solid justice, despite the not infrequent crotchet and extravagance, of the *View* cannot be denied; and though its ability has, for rhetorical purposes, been a little heightened by Macaulay, it is very considerable. But its chief interest, besides the effect it had on the drama, is the evidence it gives of the above-mentioned colloquialism. Collier, academic or nothing, is also as full of familiar contractions and cant phrase, as little regardful of formal and scholastic graces, as any gutter-scribbler of the time.

Tom Brown.

Thomas (always called Tom) Brown, though little can be said for the morality of his life and writings, is a person of more importance in literary history than has usually been allowed him. He was born (1663) at Shiffnal in Shropshire, and was well educated, going to Christ Church, Oxford. His conduct obliged him to leave his first employment of teaching, for which he probably had very little taste, and from about 1688 to his early death in 1704 he produced a profusion of miscellanies in various forms, always ingenious as makeshifts for the periodical, and very often directly leading to that periodical itself. The great essayists who immediately followed him owed more to him than might be imagined, and in not a little of his work, especially in his *Amusements, Serious and Comical*, which attempt an early "London from day to day," there is a vividness of manners which anticipates the best of the later novelists. Any form that was popular suited Tom; he wrote many letters and dialogues in the fashion of French imitations of Lucian; he took up

John Dunton's *Athenian Oracle* with a "Lacedæmonian" imitation which was much more amusing; and he wrote poems, squibs, translations, every sort of light work, with no small scholarship, with abundance of wit and humour, but unluckily with a contempt of decency beside which even the dramatists of his time look modest. The collections [1] of his work vary in bulk and contents, and it is probable that critical authentication of them is impossible.

Dunton.

The last of the four, John Dunton, possessed perhaps the least purely literary capacity, but is not the least important in history. He was born in 1659, and was descended from a line of clergymen, but was recalcitrant to the succession, and became a bookseller. In 1682 he married Elizabeth Annesley, "dear Iris," daughter of a Nonconformist divine of some fame, and sister of Mrs. Samuel Wesley and Mrs. Defoe. Dunton was a strong Whig, a man with a genius for "rambling," which carried him to America and to the Continent, and deeply bitten with the mania of the time for "Projects," of which his brother-in-law Defoe has left an interesting memorial in his *Essay* thereon. Dunton's most remarkable Project that took effect was the already mentioned *Athenian Mercury*, collected and selected in book form later as the *Athenian Oracle*, which anticipated on a magnificent scale the "answers to correspondents" not yet quite obsolete. His most important book was his *Life and Errors*,[2] a book which only its long-windedness, and the fact that its author's eccentricity here and there diverges into clear madness, exclude from the brief list of English autobiographies of the first class. After the death of "dear Iris" he married "dear Valeria," *alias* Sarah Nicholas, an heiress; but this union was less happy. He wrote and partly published a great amount of matter, a pamphlet against Harley and St. John, *Neck or Nothing*, being the chief item, and died as late as 1733, in obscurity and (apparently) distress. He is much less colloquial than those who have been mentioned before him, but is full of the curious domestic detail which also distinguishes the time, especially in Nonconformist writing; and he furnishes us with abundant and sometimes interesting particulars about booksellers, printers, authors, divines, and public men generally.

[1] I use one in 4 vols. Dublin, 1778.

[2] Ed. Nichols, 2 vols. 1818. The *Athenian Oracle*, *Athenian Sport*, etc., and their follower, the *British Apollo*, voluminous collections of question and answer, are useful and not unamusing documents. Those who fear to plunge at large into them may content themselves with a well-edited selection from the first-named by John Underhill, London, 1892.

CHAPTER IV

QUEEN ANNE PROSE

Swift—His life—His verse—His prose—His quality and achievement—The Essayists—Steele—His plays—Addison's life—His miscellaneous work—His and Steele's Essays—Bentley—Middleton—Arbuthnot—Atterbury—Bolingbroke—Butler and other divines—Shaftesbury—Mandeville—Berkeley—Excellence of his style—Defoe.

JOHN DUNTON, the eccentric bookseller mentioned at the close of the last chapter, refers to a certain "scoffing Tubman," with whose identity neither he, extensive and peculiar as was his knowledge of literary London, nor almost any one else, was then acquainted. The reference is, of course, to the *Tale of a Tub*, published anonymously in 1704—the first great book, either in prose or verse, of the eighteenth century, and in more ways than one the herald and champion at once of its special achievements in literature. Jonathan Swift,[1] its author, one of the very greatest names in English literature, was, like his connections Dryden and Herrick, a plant of no very early development. He had been born as far back as 1667, and his earlier literary productions had been confined to wretched Pindaric odes, some of them contributed to Dunton's own papers, and drawing down upon him that traditional and variously quoted sentence of his great relative, "Cousin Swift, you will never be a [Pindaric] poet," which is said to have occasioned certain ill-natured retorts on Dryden later. Swift's origin, like his character and genius, was purely English, but an accident caused him to be born in Dublin, and other accidents brought about his education in Ireland. His father died before his birth, and his mother was very poor; but his paternal uncle paid for his education at Kilkenny Grammar School and Trinity College, Dublin. He entered Trinity very early, in 1682, and seems to have been neither

Swift.

[1] Swift's *Works* have been frequently collected, but never quite satisfactorily. The best edition is still Scott's; but a new, cheap, and useful one has been begun in Bohn's Library. All Lives have been superseded by Sir Henry Craik's—1st ed. in 1 vol. London, 1883; new ed. in 2 vols. London, 1894.

happy nor successful there, though there may have been less disgrace than has sometimes been thought in his graduation *speciali gratia*, and not by the ordinary way of right, in 1686.

He was still under twenty, and for some years found no better occupation than a secretaryship in the house of his distant connection, Sir William Temple. In 1694 he went to Ireland, was ordained, and received a small living; but in two years returned to Temple, in whose house he met "Stella," Esther Johnson, his lifelong friend, and, as seems most probable, latterly his wife. Temple died in 1699, leaving Swift a small legacy and his literary executorship. He once more returned to Ireland, acted as secretary to Lord-Deputy Berkeley, received some more small preferments, though not such as he wanted, and spent the first decade of the century at Laracor, his chief benefice, and London, where he was a sort of agent for the Archbishop of Dublin. He had all this time been a kind of Whig in politics, but with a strong dislike to Whig anti-clericalism and some other differences; and about 1710 he joined the new Tory party under Harley and St. John, and carried on vigorous war against the Whigs in the *Examiner*, though he did not break personal friendship with Addison and others. His inestimable services during the four last years of Queen Anne were rewarded only with the Deanery of Dublin—it is said owing to the Queen's pious horror of the *Tale of a Tub*. Swift lived chiefly in Dublin, but with occasional visits to his friends in England, for more than thirty years longer, and the events of his life, the contests of "Vanessa" and "Stella" for his hand, or at least his heart, his interference with Irish politics, his bodily sufferings, and the end which, after five terrible years of madness, painful or lethargic, came in October 1745, are always interesting and sometimes mysterious. But we cannot dwell on them here, though they have more to do with his actual literary characteristics than is often the case. His dependency in youth, his long sojourn in lettered leisure, though in bitterness of spirit, with a household the master of which was a dilettante but a distinctly remarkable man of letters, his suppressed but evidently ardent affections, his disappointment when at last he reached fame and the chance of power, and his long residence, with failing health, in a country which he hated—all these things must be taken into account, though cautiously, in considering his work.

His life.

This is of very great bulk, and in parts of rather uncertain genuineness, for Swift was strangely careless of literary reputation, published for the most part anonymously, and, intense as is his idiosyncrasy, contrived to impress it on one or two of his intimate friends, notably on Arbuthnot. It consists of both verse and prose, but the former is rarely poetry and is at its

His verse.

best in easy *vers de société*, such as *Cadenus and Vanessa* (the record of his passion or fancy for Esther Vanhomrigh), "Vanbrugh's House," the pieces to Harley and others, and above all, the lines on his own death; or else in sheer burlesque or grotesque, where he has seldom been equalled, as in the famous "Mrs. Harris's Petition," and a hundred trifles, long and short, of the same general kind. Poetry, in the strict and rare sense, Swift seldom or never touches; his chief example of it—an example not absolutely authenticated, seeing that we only possess it as quoted by Lord Chesterfield—is a magnificent fragment about the Last Judgment. Here, and perhaps only here in verse, his characteristic indignation rises to poetic heat. Elsewhere he is infinitely ingenious and humorous in fanciful whim, and, sometimes at least, infinitely happy in expression of it, the pains which, no doubt partly owing to Temple's influence and example, he spent upon correct prose-writing being here extended and reflected in verse. For Swift, although not pedantically, or in the sense of manuals of composition, a correct writer, is so in the higher and better sense to a very unusual degree; and we know that he was so deliberately. Several passages, especially one in the *Tatler*,[1] express his views on the point, and his dislike at once of the older luxuriance which it was impossible for a man of his time to relish, and of the inroad of slovenly colloquialism which we have noticed in the last chapter.

His prose.

Yet if Swift had been, like his patron, and perhaps in some sort exemplar, Temple, nothing more, or little more, than a master of form in prose, his position in literature would be very different from that which he actually holds. His first published prose piece, the *Dissensions of Athens and Rome* (an application, according to the way of the time, to contemporary politics), contains, except in point of style, nothing very noticeable. But the anonymous volume of 1704 is compact of very different stuff. The *Battle of the Books*, a contribution to the "Ancient and Modern" debate on Temple's side and in Temple's honour, is not supreme, though very clever, admirably written and arranged, and such as no Englishman recently living, save Butler and Dryden, could have written, while Butler would have done it with more clumsiness of form, and Dryden with less lightness of fancy. The *Tale of a Tub* has supremacy. It may be peremptorily asserted that irreligion is neither intended nor involved in it. For nearly two centuries the ferocious controversies, first between Rome and Protestantism, then between different bodies of Protestants, had entirely blinded men to the extreme danger that the rough handling which they bestowed upon

[1] No. 230, 28th September 1710.

their enemies would recoil on the religion which underlay those enemies' beliefs as well as their own. And this, as well as the other danger of the excessive condemnation of "enthusiasm," was not seen till long after Swift's death. But the satire on Peter (Rome), Jack (Calvinism, or rather the extremer Protestant sects generally), and Martin (Lutheranism and Anglicanism) displays an all-pervading irony of thought, and a felicity of expressing that irony, which had never been seen in English prose before. The irony, it must be added, goes, as far as things human are concerned, very deep and very wide, and its zigzag glances at politics, philosophy, manners, the hopes and desires and pursuits and pleasures and pains of man, leave very little unscathed. There is a famous and not necessarily false story that Swift, in his sad later days, once exclaimed, in reference to the *Tale*, "What a genius I had when I wrote that book!" The exclamation, if made, was amply justified. The *Tale of a Tub* is one of the very greatest books of the world, one of those in which a great drift of universal thought receives consummate literary form.

The decade of his Whiggery (or, as it has been more accurately described, of his neutral state with Whig leanings) saw no great bulk of work, but some exquisite examples of this same irony in a lighter kind. This was the time of the charming *Argument against Abolishing Christianity* (1708) and of Swift's contributions to the *Tatler*, which periodical indeed owed him a great deal more than the mere borrowing of the *nom de guerre*—Isaac Bickerstaffe—which he had used in a series of ingenious persecutions of the almanack-maker, Partridge. The shorter period of Tory domination was very much more prolific in bulk of work, but except in the wonderful *Journal to Stella* (1710-13), which was never intended for any eye but hers (and the faithful "Dingley's"), the literary interest is a little inferior. The *Examiners* are of extraordinary force and vigour; the *Remarks on the Barrier Treaty* (1712), the *Public Spirit of the Whigs* (1714), and above all the *Conduct of the Allies* (1711), which Johnson so strangely decried, are masterly specimens of the political pamphlet. The largest work of this time, the *History of the Four Last Years of Queen Anne*, is sometimes regarded as doubtfully genuine, though there is no conclusive reason for ruling it out.

His very greatest prose work, however, dates from the last thirty years of his life, and especially from the third, fourth, and fifth lustres of this time, for the last was darkened by his final agony, and in the first decade he was too marked a man to venture on writing what might have brought upon him the exile of Atterbury or the prison of Harley and Prior. He began at once, however, a curious kind of Irish patriotism, which was in fact nothing but an English *Fronde*. In 1724 some jobbery about a new copper coinage in

Ireland gave him a subject, and he availed himself of this in the *Drapier's Letters* with almost miraculous skill; while two years later came the greatest of all his books, greater for method, range, and quiet mastery than even the *Tale*, that is to say, *Gulliver's Travels*. The short but consummate *Modest Proposal* for eating Irish children, the pair to the *Argument against Abolishing Christianity*, as a brief example of the Swiftian irony, came in 1729; and the chief of his important works later were the delightful *Polite Conversation* (1738), probably written or at least begun much earlier, in which the ways and speeches of ordinary good society are reproduced with infinite humour and spirit, and the *Directions to Servants*, almost as witty, but more marked with Swift's ugliest fault, a coarseness of idea and language, which seems rather the result of positive and individual disease than the survival of Restoration license.

His quality and achievement.

There is no doubt that on the whole Swift's peculiar powers, temper, and style are shown in his one generally known book as well as anywhere else. The absence of the fresher, more whimsical, and perhaps even deeper, irony and pessimism of the *Tale of a Tub*, and the loss of self-control indicated in the savage misanthropy of the Houyhnhnms finale, are compensated by a more methodical and intelligible scheme, by the charm of narrative, by range and variety of subject, and by the abundance of little lively touches which that narrative suggests and facilitates. The mere question of the originality of the scheme is, as usual, one of the very slightest importance. Swift had predecessors, if he had not patterns, in Lucian and in scores of other writers down to and beyond Cyrano de Bergerac. The idea, indeed, of combining the interest and novelty of foreign travel with an obvious satire on "travellers' tales," and a somewhat less obvious one on the follies, vices, and contrasted foibles of mankind, is not beyond the range of an extremely moderate intellect, and could never be regarded as the property or copyright even of the greatest. It is the astonishing vigour and variety of Swift's dealing with this public stuff that craves notice; and twenty times the space here available would be too little to do justice to that. The versatility with which the picture—it can hardly even at its worst be called the caricature—of mankind is adjusted to the different meridians of the little people, the giants, the pedants, the unhappy immortals, and the horses—the dexterous relief of the satirist's lash with the mere tickling of the humorist—the wonderful prodigality of power and the more wonderful economy of words and mere decorations—all these things deserve the most careful study, and the most careful study will not in the least interfere with, but will only enhance, the perpetual enjoyment of them.

It only remains to point out very briefly the suitableness of the

style to the work. Swift's style is extremely unadorned, though the unfailing spirit of irony prevents it from being, except to the most poor and unhappy tastes, in the very least degree flat. Though not free from grammatical licenses, it is on the whole correct enough, and is perfectly straightforward and clear. There may be a very different meaning lurking by way of innuendo behind Swift's literal and grammatical sense, but that sense itself can never be mistaken. Further, he has—unless he deliberately assumes them as the costume of a part he is playing—absolutely no distinguishing tricks or manners, no catchwords, and in especial no unusual phrases or vocables either imitated or invented. In objecting to neologisms, as he did very strongly, he was perhaps critically in the wrong; for a language which ceases to grow dies. But, like some, though by no means all, similar objectors, he has justified his theory by his practice. In fact, if intellectual genius and literary art be taken together, no prose-writer, who is a prose-writer mainly, is Swift's superior, and a man might be hard put to it to say who among such writers in the plainer English can be pronounced his equal.

The Essayists.

It has been said that it is hard to settle the credit of the invention of the Queen Anne Essay, in which the characteristic of the later Augustan period was chiefly shown. For years before it appeared, the essay-writers, from Bacon to Temple on the one hand, and the journalists, of whom the most remarkable were mentioned at the close of the last chapter, on the other, had been bearing down nearer and nearer to this particular point. The actual starting is usually assigned to the *Review* of a greater than any of these journalists, Daniel Defoe, who will, however, find a more suitable place later in this chapter. And it is noteworthy that Swift, whose fertility in ideas was not less remarkable than the nonchalance with which he abandoned them or suggested them to his friends, was most intimate with Steele and Addison just at the time of the appearance of the *Tatler*, lent it a *nom de guerre*, wrote for it, and may in different metaphors be said to have given it inspiration, atmosphere, motive power, launch. But it was undoubtedly set agoing under the management of another person, Steele, and he need not be deprived of the honour.

Steele.

Richard Steele was born in Dublin in March 1672, but he had little to do with Ireland afterwards. His school was the Charterhouse, and from it he went to Merton College at Oxford, where he was postmaster. But though he made some stay at the University he took no degree, and left it for the army, beginning as a cadet or gentleman volunteer in the Second Life Guards, whence he passed as an ensign to the Coldstreams and as a captain to Lucas's Foot. He became Gazetteer in 1707, and a

little later engaged, with more zeal than discretion, in Whig politics, being expelled from the House of Commons in the turbulent last years of Anne. The success of the Hanoverians restored him to fortune, or the chance of it, and he was knighted and made patentee of Drury Lane. But he was always a spendthrift and a speculator, and in his later years he had to retire to an estate which his second wife (an heiress in Wales as the first had been in the West Indies) had brought him near Caermarthen. He died there in 1729. His letters and even his regular works tell us a great deal about his personality, which, especially as contrasted with that of Addison, has occasioned much writing.

Steele's desertion of the University for the army might not seem to argue a devotion to the Muses. But he began[1] while still a soldier by a book of devotion, *The Christian Hero* (1701), and it was not in him, whatever it might have been in another, at all inconsistent to turn to play-writing, in which occupation he observed, though not excessively, the warnings of Jeremy Collier. The *Tatler* (1709) opened his true vein, and in it, in the *Spectator*, in the *Guardian*, in the *Englishman*, *Lover*, and other periodicals, he displayed a faculty for miscellany more engaging, though much less accomplished, than Addison's own. In the political articles of this series, and still more in his political pamphlets, he is at his worst, for he had no argumentative faculty, and was utterly at the mercy of such an opponent as Swift. *The Conscious Lovers*, his most famous play, was late (1722), and is distinguished, amid the poor plays between Farquhar and Sheridan, for its mixture of briskness and amiability. There was a third ingredient, sentimentality, which is indeed sufficiently prominent in Steele's earlier comedies, *The Funeral* (1701), *The Lying Lover* (1703), and *The Tender Husband* (1705), and by no means absent from his essays. But, with a little allowance, it adds to these latter a charm which, though it may be less perceptible to later generations than it was to those who had sickened of the ineffable brutality of the time immediately preceding, can still be felt.

Of the plays, though all endeavour to carry out Collier's principles, *The Conscious Lovers* is the only one which deserves Fielding's raillery, through Parson Adams, as to its being "as good as a sermon," which Hazlitt has rather unfairly extended to all. Even *The Con-*

[1] No complete edition. The *Tatler*, *Spectator*, and *Guardian* essays are in the usual *British Essayists;* the others must be sought in original editions, or ed. Nichols, 4 vols. 1791. There is an excellent selection from the former set (Oxford, 1885) and an admirable monograph (London, 1886) by Mr. Austin Dobson. The plays are in the "Mermaid Series" (London, 1894), edited by Mr. Aitken, who has also written a long *Life of Steele* (2 vols. London, 1889).

scious Lovers contains, in the scenes between Tom and Phillis, pictures of flirtation belowstairs which, with all Steele's tenderness and good feeling, have nearly as much vivacity as any between the most brazen varlets and baggages of the Restoration dramatists. *The Lying Lover*, an adaptation of *Le Menteur*, is of no great merit, perhaps because it also has a slight tendency to sermonising. But *The Funeral*, though very unnatural in plot and decidedly unequal in character, contains a famous passage of farcical comedy between an undertaker and his mates, and a good though rascally lawyer. The most uniformly amusing of the four is *The Tender Husband*, though the appropriateness of the title is a little open to question. The pair of innocents, the romantic heiress Biddy Tipkin and the clumsy heir Humphry Gubbin, are really diverting, and in the first case to no small extent original; while they have furnished hints to no less successors than Fielding, Goldsmith, Sheridan, and Miss Austen. The lawyer and the gallant are also distinctly good, and the aunt has again furnished hints for Mrs. Malaprop, as Biddy has for Lydia. Steele, who always confessed, and probably as a rule exaggerated, his debts to Addison, acknowledges them here; and there is a certain Addisonian tone about some of the humours, though Steele was quite able to have supplied them. Fond as he was of the theatre, however, and familiar with it, he had little notion of constructing a play, and his morals constantly tripped up his art. The essay, not the drama, was his real field.

His plays.

The almost inextricable entanglement of the work of Steele with Addison's, and the close connection of the two in life, have always occasioned a sort of comparison, now to the advantage of the one, now to that of the other, in literary history; and there is probably more loss than gain in the endeavour to separate them sternly. We may therefore best give Addison's life, and such short sketch of his books as is possible now, and then consider together the work, still in parts not very clearly attributable to one more than to the other, which gives them, and must always give them, an exalted place in English literature.

Joseph Addison[1] was born, like Steele, in 1672, but in May instead of in March. His father, Lancelot Addison, was a divine of parts and position, who became Dean of Lichfield. His mother's name was Jane Gulston. After experience of some country schools, at one of which he is said to have shared in a "barring-out," he, like

[1] Many editions of complete *Works* (the best by Hurd), which are still worth getting for the miscellanies. *Poems* in Chalmers. Essays (most) in *British Essayists: Selected Essays*, by J. R. Green (London, 1880) and T. Arnold (Oxford, 1886).

Steele, went to the Charterhouse and then to Oxford, where he was first at Queen's, then at Magdalen, holding a demyship, taking his Master's degree in 1693, and being elected to a Fellowship in 1697, at the latter college, where "Addison's Walk" preserves his name. He made early acquaintance with Dryden, but adopted Whig politics; and, by the influence of Montague, obtained in 1699 a travelling pension of £300 a year. He discharged the obligation loyally, remaining four years abroad, visiting most parts of the Continent, and preparing, if not finishing, his only prose works of bulk, the *Remarks on Italy* (1704) and the *Dialogues on Medals*, not published till later. But when he came back in 1703, Halifax was out of favour, his pension was stopped, and, having broken off his University career by his failure to take orders, he was for some time in doubtful prospects. But his poem of *The Campaign*, in which he celebrated Blenheim (1704), with one fine passage and a good deal of platitude, gained high reputation in the dearth of poetical accomplishment, and the short summer of favour for men of letters, which followed Dryden's death; and he was made a Commissioner of Excise.

Addison's life.

This was the first of a long series of appointments, official and diplomatic, which was not, thanks to Swift, entirely interrupted even during the Tory triumph, and which enabled Addison, who had been in 1703 nearly penniless, to lay out, in 1711, £10,000 on an estate in Warwickshire. It culminated in 1717, after the Hanoverian triumph, by his being appointed Secretary of State, which office he held but a short time, resigning it for a large pension. He had a year before married the Countess Dowager of Warwick, and he died of dropsy at Holland House in 1719, aged only forty-seven. His character has been discussed, not with acrimony, for no one can dislike Addison, but with some heat. He had none of the numerous foibles of which Steele was guilty, except a rather too great devotion to wine. But the famous and magnificent "Character of Atticus," by Pope, is generally supposed by all but partisans to be at best a poisoned dart, which hit true. His correct morality—the Bohemian philosopher Mandeville called him "a parson in a tie-wig"—has been set down to cold-bloodedness, and there has even been noticeable dissension about the relative amount of literary genius in him and in Steele.

As noticed already, Addison's literary work outside periodicals is by no means small. His early Latin poems are very clever, and very happy in their artificial way. Of his English verse nothing has survived, except his really beautiful hymns, where the combination of sincere religious feelings (of the sincerity of Addison's religion there is absolutely no doubt, though

His miscellaneous work.

it was of a kind now out of fashion) and of critical restraint produced things of real, though modest and quiet, excellence. "The Lord my pasture shall prepare," "The spacious firmament on high," and "How are Thy servants blest! O Lord," may lack the mystical inspiration of the greatest hymns, but their cheerful piety, their graceful use of images, which, though common, are never mean, their finish and even, for the time, their fervour make them singularly pleasant. The man who wrote them may have had foibles and shortcomings, but he can have had no very grave faults, as the authors of more hysterical and glowing compositions easily might.

The two principal prose works are little read now, but they are worth reading. They show respectable learning (with limitations admitted by such a well-qualified and well-affected critic as Macaulay), they are excellent examples (though not so excellent as the Essays) of Addison's justly famous prose, and they exhibit, in the opening of the *Medals* and in all the descriptive passages of the *Italy*, the curious insensibility of the time to natural beauty, or else its almost more curious inability to express what it felt, save in the merest generalities and commonplaces.

The three plays at least indicate Addison's possession, though in a much less degree, of his master Dryden's general faculty of literary craftsmanship. The opera of *Rosamond* is, indeed, clearly modelled on Dryden in its serious parts, but is no great success there. The lighter and more whimsical quality of Addison's humour enabled him to do better in the farcical passages, which, especially the speeches of Sir Trusty, sometimes have a singularly modern and almost Gilbertian quality about them. The comedy of *The Drummer*, where a Wiltshire tradition is used to make a play on a theme not entirely different from Steele's *Funeral* (in each a husband is thought to be dead when he is not), contains, like Steele's own pieces, some smart "words," but no very good dramatic situation or handling. It is, also like Steele's, an attempt to write Restoration drama in the fear of Jeremy Collier. *Cato*, the most famous, is at this time of day by far the least interesting. Its universally known stock-pieces give almost all that it has of merit in versification and style; as a drama it has an uninteresting plot, wooden characters, and a great absence of life and idiosyncrasy.

It is very different when we turn to the Essays. The so-called Essay which Steele launched in the *Tatler*, which was taken up and perfected in the *Spectator*, which had numerous immediate followers, and a succession of the greatest importance at intervals throughout the century, and which at once expressed and influenced the tone and thought of that century after a fashion rarely paralleled, was not originally started in quite the form

His and Steele's Essays.

which it soon assumed, and never, for the greater part of a hundred years, wholly lost. Naturally enough, Steele at first endeavoured to make it a newspaper, as well as a miscellany and review. But by degrees, and before very long, news was dropped, and comment, in the form of special essays, of "letters to the editor," sometimes real, oftener manufactured, of tales and articles of all the various kinds which have subsisted with no such great change till the present day, reigned alone. As Addison's hand prevailed—though literature, religion, and even politics now and then, the theatre very often, and other things were not neglected—the main feature of the two papers, and especially of the *Spectator*, became a kind of light but distinctly firm censorship of manners, especially the part of them nearest to morals, and of morals, especially the part of them nearest to manners. Steele, always zealous and always generous, but a little wanting in criticism, not infrequently diverged into sentimentality. Addison's tendency, though he, too, was unflinchingly on virtue's side, was rather towards a very mellow and not unindulgent but still distinctly cynical cynicism—a smile too demure ever to be a grin, but sometimes, except on religious subjects, faintly and distantly approaching a sneer. This appears even in the most elaborate and kindly of the imaginative creations of the double series, Sir Roger de Coverley, whom Steele indeed seems to have invented, but whom Addison adopted, perfected, and (some, perhaps without reason, say) even killed out of kindness, lest a less delicate touch should take the bloom off him. This great creation, which comes nearer than anything out of prose fiction or drama to the masterpieces of the novelists and dramatists, is accompanied by others hardly less masterly; while Addison constantly, and Steele not seldom, has sketches or touches as perfect in their way, though less elaborate. It is scarcely too much to say that these papers, and especially the *Spectator*, taught the eighteenth century how it should, and especially how it should not, behave in public places, from churches to theatres; what books it should like, and how it should like them; how it should treat its lovers, mistresses, husbands, wives, parents, and friends; that it might politely sneer at operas, and must not take any art except literature too seriously; that a moderate and refined devotion to the Protestant religion and the Hanoverian succession was the duty, though not the whole duty, of a gentleman. It is still a little astonishing to find with what docility the century obeyed and learnt its lesson. Addison died a little before, Steele not much after, its first quarter closed; yet in the lighter work of sixty or seventy years later we shall find, with the slightest differences of external fashion, the laws of the *Spectator* held still by "the town" with hardly a murmur, by the country without the slightest hesitation. In particular, these papers taught the

century how to write; and the lesson was accepted on this point with almost more unhesitating obedience than on any other. The magnificent eulogy of Johnson,[1] who had himself deviated not a little, though perhaps unconsciously, from Addisonian practice, would have been disputed by hardly any one who reached manhood in England between the Peace of Utrecht and the French Revolution; and, abating its exclusiveness a little, it remains true still.

Steele, though he has some rarer flights than his friend, is much less correct, and much less polished; while, though he had started with equal chances, his rambling life had stored him with far less learning than Addison possessed. The latter, while he never reached the massive strength and fiery force of Swift, did even more than Swift himself to lift English prose out of the rut, or rather quagmire, of colloquialism and slovenliness in which, as we have seen, it was sinking. He could even, though he rarely did, rise to a certain solemnity—caught, it may be, from Temple, who must have had much influence on him. But, like Temple's, though with a more modern, as well as a more varied and completely polished, touch, his style was chiefly devoted to the "middle" subjects and manners. He very rarely attempts sheer whimsical fooling. But he can treat all the subjects that come within the purview and interests of a well-bred man of this world, who by no means forgets the next, in a style quite inimitable in its golden mediocrity—well-informed, without being in the least pedantic; moral, without direct preaching (unless he gives forewarning); slightly superior, but with no provoking condescension in it; polite, without being frivolous or finicking; neat, but not overdressed; easy, but, as Johnson justly states, never familiar in any offensive degree. It is easier to feel enthusiasm about Steele, who had so much, than about Addison, who at any rate shows so little; and on the character, the genius, the originality of the two there may always be room for dispute. But it seems incredible that any one should deny to Addison the credit of being by far the greater artist, and of having brought his own rather special, rather limited, but peculiar and admirable division of art to a perfection seldom elsewhere attained in letters.

These three greatest writers were surrounded by others hardly less than great. Arbuthnot, Atterbury, Bentley, Bolingbroke, Mandeville, the younger Shaftesbury, Berkeley, Butler, Middleton, were all either actual contributors to the great periodical series, or intimately connected with those who wrote these, or (which is of equal

[1] "Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar, but not coarse, and elegant, but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison." But this is only the crowning sentence of the peroration, throughout laudatory, of the *Life*.

importance to us) at any rate exponents of the extremely plain prose style, which required the exquisite concinnity of Addison, the volcanic and Titanic force and fire of Swift, or the more than Attic stateliness and grace of Berkeley, to save it from being too plain. The order in which they are to be mentioned is unimportant, and few can have more than very brief space, but none must pass unnoticed.

Bentley.

Richard Bentley, a very great classical scholar, and no mean writer of English, was a Yorkshireman, born in 1662, and educated at Wakefield. He went early to St. John's College, Cambridge, was taken as a private tutor into the household of Stillingfleet, took orders not very early, was made King's Librarian in 1694, engaged, and was completely victorious, in the Ancient and Modern controversy, especially in reference to the *Epistles of Phalaris;* was made Master of Trinity in 1699, and passed nearly the whole of his more than forty years of mastership, till his death in 1742, in a desperate struggle with his college, wherein, if his adversaries were unscrupulous, he was no less so, while the right was on the whole rather against him, though his bulldog tenacity has won over most commentators on the matter to his side. There is at any rate no doubt of his learning, his logical power, and his very real, though gruff and horseplayful, humour. To merely English literature he stands[1] in two very different relations. His almost incredibly absurd emendations on Milton would, if the thing were not totally alien from the spirit of the man, seem like a designed parody on classical scholarship itself. But his writing, especially in the famous *Phalaris* dissertation, and in the remarks on the Deist Collins, is extraordinarily vigorous and vivid. His birth-date, probably even more than a design to avoid the reproach of pedantry, made him colloquial, homely, and familiar down to the very level from which Swift and Addison tried to lift, and to a great extent succeeded in lifting, prose; but his native force and his wide learning save him, though sometimes with difficulty, from the merely vulgar.

Middleton.

Conyers Middleton,[2] Bentley's most deadly enemy, was, like Bentley, a Yorkshireman, but was much younger, having been born at Richmond in 1683. He went to Trinity young, and was not only a Fellow thereof, but connected throughout his life with Cambridge, by his tenure of the offices of University Librarian from 1722 onwards, and Woodwardian Professor of Geology for a time. He was a man of property, was thrice married, and held several livings till his death in 1750, though his orthodoxy was, in his own times and afterwards, seriously impugned.

This does not concern us here, though it may be observed that

[1] *Works* in various editions. The *Phalaris* dissertation often separately.

[2] *Miscellaneous Works*, 5 vols. 1753. The *Cicero* has been often reprinted.

Middleton may be cleared from anything but a rather advanced stage of the latitudinarianism and dislike of "enthusiasm" which was generally felt by the men of his time, and which invited—indeed necessitated—the Evangelical and Methodist revolt. So, too, we need not busy ourselves much with the question whether he directly plagiarised, or only rather freely borrowed from the Scotch Latinist, Bellenden, in his longest and most famous prose work, the *Life of Cicero* (1741). Besides this, he wrote two controversial works of length—ostensibly directed against Popery, certainly against extreme supernaturalism, and, as his enemies will have it, covertly against Christianity—entitled *A Letter from Rome, showing an exact Conformity between Popery and Paganism* (1729), and *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are supposed to have existed in the Christian Church* (1748); with a large number of small pamphlets on a variety of subjects, in treating which he showed wide culture and intelligence. His place here, however, is that of the most distinguished representative of the absolutely plain style—not colloquial and vernacular like Bentley's, but on the other hand attempting none of the graces which Addison and Berkeley in their different ways achieved—a style more like the plainer Latin or French styles than like anything else in English.

John Arbuthnot,[1] the "moon" of Swift, born 1667, came of the noble family of that name in Kincardineshire, but went to Oxford, and spent all the later part of his life in London, where he was physician to Queen Anne, a strong Tory, and an intimate friend of Swift and Pope. He died in 1735, much respected and beloved. Arbuthnot's literary fate, or rather the position which he deliberately chose, was peculiar. It is very difficult to identify much of his work, and what seems certainly his (especially the famous *History of John Bull* and *The Memoirs of Scriblerus*) is exceedingly like Swift, and was pretty certainly produced in concert with that strange genius, who, unlike some animals, never took colour from his surroundings, but always gave them his own. It is, however, high enough praise that Arbuthnot, at the best of his variable work, is not inferior to anything but the very best of Swift. There is the same fertility and the same unerringness of irony; and, if we can distinguish, it is only that a half or wholly good-natured amusement takes the place of Swift's indignation. Arbuthnot.

Francis Atterbury,[2] born in Buckinghamshire in 1672, a distinguished Christ Church man, who, after being head of his house, obtained the Bishopric of Rochester and the Deanery of Westminster in succession to Sprat, was the divine and scholar of the extreme

[1] Ed. Aitken, 1892.

[2] No complete or modern edition.

Tory party, as Arbuthnot was their man of science. He has been accused not merely of conspiring after the Hanoverian succession, but of denying it, and sailing too near perjury in his denial. Of this there is no sufficient proof, and we must remember that the political ethics of the age were extremely accommodating. He was at any rate attainted, and banished (in 1723) to France, where he died nine years later. A brilliant and popular preacher, a pleasant letter-writer, a most dangerous controversialist and debater, and a good critic (though he made the usual mistakes of his age about poetry before Waller), Atterbury wrote in a style not very unlike Addison's, though inferior to it.

Atterbury.

The huge contemporary fame of Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke,[1] and its rapid and lasting decline after his death, are among the commonplaces of literary history. He was born in 1678, passed through Eton and Christ Church, entered Parliament very early, was Secretary for War at six-and-twenty, climbed with Harley to power, and contrived to edge his companion "out," but remained "in" himself only a few days, fled to the Continent, returned to England and recovered his estates, but not his seat in Parliament, in 1723, organised and carried on the English *Fronde* against Walpole, and died in 1751. His career—for he was as famous for "wildness" as for success—was of those which specially appeal to the vulgar, and are not uninteresting even to unvulgar tastes. He was beyond question one of the greatest orators of his day, and he was extravagantly praised by his friends, who happened to include the chief poet and the greatest prose writer of the time. Yet hardly any one, who for generations has opened the not few volumes of his works, has closed them without more or less profound disappointment. Bolingbroke, more than any other English writer, is a rhetorician pure and simple; and it was his misfortune, first, that the subjects of his rhetoric were not the great and perennial subjects, but puny ephemeral forms of them—the partisan and personal politics of his day, the singularly shallow form of infidelity called Deism, and the like—and, secondly, that his time deprived him of many, if not most, of the rhetorician's most telling weapons. The *Letter to Windham* (1716), a sort of apologia, and the *Ideal of a Patriot King* (1749) exhibit him at his best.

Bolingbroke.

Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761), a pluralist courtier, and more than doubtfully orthodox divine on the Whig side, held four sees in succession, in the earliest of which he was the cause of much literature, or at least many books, by provoking the famous "Bangorian" controversy. He himself wrote clearly and well. Nor

[1] *Works*, 8 vols. London, 1809.

can the same praise be denied to Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), philosopher, physicist, and divine. There is more diversity of opinion about the purely literary merits, as distinguished from the unquestioned claims in religious philosophy, of Bishop Joseph Butler, who was born at Wantage in 1692, left Nonconformity for the Church, went to Oriel, became Preacher at the Rolls Chapel, Rector of Stanhope, Bishop of Bristol, Dean of St. Paul's, and, lastly, Bishop of Durham, owing these appointments to no cringing or intrigue, but to his own great learning, piety, wisdom, and churchmanship, fortunately backed by Queen Caroline's fancy for philosophy. Butler's *Sermons*, published in 1726, and his *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion* ten years later, occasionally contain aphorisms of beauty equal to their depth; but it is too much to claim "crispness and clearness" for his general style,[1] which is, on the contrary, too often obscure and tough.

Butler and other divines.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, the third of his names and title, the grandson of "Achitophel," and the son of the "shapeless lump" (a phrase for which he never forgave Dryden), was born in 1671. His mother was Lady Dorothy Manners. He was brought up partly by a learned lady, and partly by Locke. He was for three years at Winchester, went to no University, and travelled a good deal abroad. He sat for a short time in the House of Commons, but made no figure there or in the House of Lords, where, during nearly the whole time of his tenure of the earldom (1699-1713), politics, whether Whig or Tory, were of too rough a cast for his dilettantism. He died after more foreign travel in 1713. His writings, scattered and not extensive, had been collected two years before as *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*.[2] Shaftesbury was an original and almost powerful thinker and writer, spoilt by an irregular education, a sort of morbid aversion from English thought generally, an early attack of Deism, and a strong touch of affectation. Much harm has been done to him by Lamb's description of his style as "genteel," a word in Lamb's time and later not connoting the snobbishness which has for half a century been associated with it. "Superfine," the usual epithet, is truer; though Dr. George Campbell, an excellent critic, was somewhat too severe[3] on Shaftesbury's Gallicisms, and his imprudent and rather amateurish engagement in the Deist controversy of the time caused

Shaftesbury.

[1] Butler's *Sermons* and *Analogy*, which have long played an important part as text-books in the Oxford curriculum, have been well cared for in matter of reprints by that University. Clarke and Hoadly must be sought, if at all, in contemporary editions.

[2] New ed. 3 vols. London, 1749.

[3] In his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*.

him to be broken a little too ruthlessly on the wheel, adamantine in polish as in strength, of Berkeley in *Alciphron*. His central doctrine, that ridicule is the test of truth, as well as his style, are in reality caricatures of Addison, though the dates preclude any notion of plagiarism. He is full of suggestion, and might have been a great thinker and writer.

Shaftesbury's superfineness and his optimism seem to have had at least a considerable share in provoking the cynical pessimism of another remarkable thinker of this time, Bernard Mandeville, or de Mandeville,[1] a Dutchman, born at Dordrecht about 1670, who came early to London, attained a singular mastery of English, practised physic, and died in 1733. There is some mystery, and probably some mystification, about the origin of *The Grumbling Hive*, better known by its later title of *The Fable of the Bees*. No edition earlier than 1705 is known, but Mandeville claimed a much earlier date for it. About nine years later a reprint, in 1714, drew attention, and after yet another nine years another was "presented" by the Grand Jury of Middlesex, and fiercely denounced by men of such importance as Law and Berkeley. The book, which was constantly enlarged, is in its final form a cluster of prose tractates, with a verse nucleus (the original piece) showing how vice made some bees happy, and virtue made them miserable. A good deal of other work, some certainly and some probably spurious, is attributed to Mandeville, who is the Diogenes of English philosophy. An exceedingly charitable judgment may impute to deliberate paradox, and to irritation at Shaftesbury's airy gentility, his doctrine that private vices are public benefits; but the gusto with which he caricatures and debases everything pure and noble and of good report is, unluckily, too genuine. He thought, however, with great force and acuteness, despite his moral twist; he had a strong, fertile, and whimsical humour; and his style, plebeian as it is, may challenge comparison with the most famous literary vernaculars in English for racy individuality.

Mandeville.

If, however, Shaftesbury has rather too much of the peacock, and Mandeville a great deal too much of the polecat about him, no depreciatory animal comparison need be sought or feared for George Berkeley, the best praised man of his time, and among the most deserving of praise. He was born in 1685 near Kilkenny, and was educated first, like Swift and Congreve earlier, at its famous grammar school, and then at Trinity College, Dublin, where he made a long residence, and wrote his chief purely

Berkeley.

[1] *Works* never collected—some rare and some doubtful. *The Fable of the Bees* is common. I use the so-called *ninth* (Edinburgh, 1755) edition of its fullest form.

philosophical works. In 1713 he went to London, and was introduced to the wits by Swift, after which he travelled on the Continent for several years. He was made Dean of Derry in 1724, went with missionary schemes, which were defeated, to North America, but returned, in 1731, and published the admirable dialogues of *Alciphron.* He was made Bishop of Cloyne in 1734, and for eighteen years resided in his diocese. A few months before his death, in 1753, he had gone, in bad health, to Oxford, and he died there.

Berkeley's principal works,[1] or groups of works, are first—*The Theory of Vision* (1709), *The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), and the *Dialogues of Hylas* [Materialist] *and Philonous* [partisan of mind], in which, continuing the Lockian process of argument against innate ideas, he practically re-established them by a further process of destruction, and brought down on himself a great deal of very ignorant attack or banter for his supposed denial of matter. The above-mentioned *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher*, is a series of dialogues, in which the popular infidelity of the day, whether optimist like Shaftesbury's, pessimistical like Mandeville's, or one-sidedly critical like that of the Deists proper, is attacked in a fashion which those who sympathise with the victims accuse of occasional unfairness, but which has extraordinary cogency as polemic, and extraordinary brilliance as literature. His last important book was *Siris*, an odd miscellany, advocating tar-water for the body, and administering much excellent mysticism to the soul; but he wrote some minor things, and a good many letters, diaries, etc., which were not fully published till the later years of the present century.

Unusually good as a man, and unusually great as a philosopher, Berkeley would have stood in the first rank as a mere writer had his character been bad or unknown, and the matter of his writings unimportant. The charm of his style is at once so subtle and so pervading that it is extremely difficult to separate and define it. He has no mannerisms; although he is a most accomplished ironist, he does not depend upon irony for the seasoning of his style as, in different ways, do Addison and Swift; he can give the plainest and most unadorned exposition of an abstruse, philosophical doctrine with perfect literary grace. And (as, for instance, in Lysicles' version of Mandeville's vices-and-benefits argument) he can saturate a long passage with satiric innuendo, never once breaking out into direct tirade or direct burlesque. He can illustrate admirably, but he is never the dupe of his illustrations. He is clearer even than Hobbes and infinitely more elegant, while

Excellence of his style.

[1] Editions are numerous, but for critical purposes, and also as containing some previously unpublished matter, Professor Campbell Fraser's (4 vols. Oxford, 1871) is the standard.

his dialect and arrangement, though originally arrived at for argumentative purposes, or at least in argumentative works, are equally suited for narrative, for dialogue, for description, for almost every literary end. Were it not for the intangibleness, and therefore the inimitableness of his style, he would be an even better general model than Addison; and, as it is, he is unquestionably the best model in English, if not in any language, for philosophical, and indeed for argumentative, writing generally.

Defoe.

Daniel Defoe,[1] the link between the great essayists of the earlier and the great novelists of the middle years of the eighteenth century —one of the most voluminous and problematical of English writers, as well as one of all but the greatest—a man, too, of very questionable life and character—could not be fully discussed in any compendious history of English literature. But luckily it is by no means necessary that he should be so discussed, the strictly literary lines of his work being broad and clear, and the problems both of it and of his life being such as may, without any loss, be left to the specialist. He was born, it would seem, in 1659 (not, as used to be thought, 1661) in the heart of London, St. Giles's, Cripplegate, where his father (whose name was certainly Foe) was a butcher. It is not known for what reason or cause Daniel, when more than fifty, assumed the "de," sometimes as separate particle, sometimes in composition. He was well educated, but instead of becoming a Nonconformist minister, took to trade, which at intervals and in various forms (stocking-selling, tile-making, etc.) he pursued with no great luck. He seems to have been a partaker in Monmouth's rebellion, and was certainly a good deal abroad in the later years of the seventeenth century, but he early took to the vocation of pamphleteering, which, with journalism and novel-writing, gave his three great literary courses. The chief among many results of this was the famous *Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702), a statement of the views of the extreme "Highflying" or High Church party, in which some have seen irony, but which really is the exact analogue in argument of his future fictions, that is to say, an imitation of what he wanted to represent so close that it looks exactly like fact. He was prosecuted, fined, pilloried, and imprisoned, but, in the growing Whig temper of the nation, the piece was undoubtedly very effective.

[1] There is no complete collection, and hardly the possibility of any, of Defoe's enormous work. Partial collections, and lives, are rather numerous. The most recent of the former is Mr. Aitken's (of the novels), the most accessible of the general works that in Bohn's Library (7 vols.), the best Hazlitt's (3 vols. London, 1841). Mr. Lee's speculative but laborious *Life and Unpublished Writings* (3 vols. London, 1869) is necessary for all thorough students; Professor Morley's selection of the miscellaneous works (not fiction) in the "Carisbrooke Library" is very cheap and useful.

For the greater part of the reign of Queen Anne, and at first in prison, Defoe carried on, from 1704 to 1713, his famous *Review*, the prototype to some extent of the great later periodicals, but written entirely by himself. Before he had been long in prison he was liberated by Harley, of whose statesmanship, shifty in method, and strangely compounded of Toryism and Whiggery in principle, Defoe became a zealous secret agent. He had a great deal to do with negotiating the Union with Scotland. Nor did Harley's fall put an end to his engagement in subterranean branches of the public service; for it has long been known that under the House of Hanover he discharged the delicate, or indelicate, part of a Tory journalist, secretly paid by the Whig Government to tone down and take the sting out of *Mist's Journal* and other Opposition papers. He lived for a good many years longer, and did his very best literary work in his latest period; but at the last he experienced some unexplained revolution of fortune, and died at Moorfields, in concealment and distress, in 1731.

Of Defoe's, in the strictest sense, innumerable works the following catalogue of the most important may serve:—*Essay on Projects* (1698), an instance of the restless tendency of the time towards commercial and social improvements, and of Defoe's own fertility; *The True-Born Englishman* (1701), an argument in vigorous though most unpoetical verse to clear William from the disability of his foreign origin; the *Hymn to the Pillory* (1703), composed on the occasion of his exhibition in that implement, still more vigorous and a little less unpoetical; the curious political satire of the *Consolidator* (1705); the masterly *Relation of Mrs. Veal*, the first instance of his peculiar narrative habit; *Jure Divino* (1706), worse verse and also worse sense than *The True-Born Englishman*. But the best of these is poor compared with the great group of fiction of his later years—*Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Duncan Campbell*, *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, and *Captain Singleton* (all produced in 1720), *Moll Flanders*, the *History of the Plague*, and *Colonel Jack* (all in 1722), *Roxana* (1724), and *A New Voyage Round the World* (1725). Besides these, he published in his later years, as he had in his earlier, a crowd of works, small and great, political, topographical, historical, moral, and miscellaneous.

It is not of much use to discuss Defoe's moral character, and it is sincerely to be hoped that no more revelations concerning it will turn up, inasmuch as each is more damaging than the last, except to those who have succeeded in taking his true measure once for all. It is that of a man who, with no high, fine, or poetical sentiment to save him, shared to the full the partisan enthusiasm of his time, and its belief that all was fair in politics. His literary idiosyncrasy is

more comfortable to handle. He was a man of extraordinary industry and versatility, who took an interest, subject to the limitations of his temperament, in almost everything, whose brain was wonderfully fertile, and who had a style, if not of the finest or most exquisite, singularly well suited to the multifarious duties to which he put it. Also, he could give, as hardly even Bunyan had given before him, and as nobody has since, absolute verisimilitude to fictitious presentations. He seems to have done this mainly by a certain chameleon-like faculty of assuming the atmosphere and colour of his subject, and by a cunning profusion of exactly-suited and selected detail. It is enough that in *Robinson Crusoe* he has produced, by help of this gift, a book which is, throughout its first two parts, one of the great books of the world in its particular kind; and that parts of *Moll Flanders*, *Captain Singleton*, and *Colonel Jack*, at least, are not inferior. Further, the "lift" which Defoe gave to the novel was enormous. He was still dependent on adventure; he did not advance much, if at all, beyond the more prosaic romantic scheme. But the extraordinary verisimilitude of his action could not but show the way to the last step that remained to be taken, the final projection of character.

CHAPTER V

POPE AND HIS ELDER CONTEMPORARIES IN VERSE

Divisions of eighteenth-century verse—Pope: his life—His work—His character—His poetry—His couplet and paragraph—His phrase—His subjects—Garth—Blackmore—Congreve, etc.—Prior—His metrical importance—Gay—Young—Parnell—Lady Winchelsea.

THE poetry of the eighteenth century can be classified with a completeness and convenience uncommon in literary periods. In the first division we see the complete triumph of the "classical" and "correct," or conventional, ideal at once exemplified and achieved in the work of Pope. This is followed by a rather longer period, in which the dominant poetry—the kind of verse admired and praised by almost all the vulgar and a few of the elect—is imitation of Pope, tempered more or less by that of Dryden. But side by side with both these (and even at the very earliest represented by Lady Winchelsea and one or two others) there is a party of mostly unintentional revolt which first, as represented by Thomson, reverts to nature in observation, but generalises still in expression; then, as presented by Gray, while not neglecting nature, changes all the sources of its literary inspiration, seeking them always farther back and wider. In respect of form the two first schools are almost wholly busied, except in light and occasional verse, with the couplet; while the third, in its endeavour not to be conventional, takes refuge in blank verse and stanza-forms. In the present chapter we shall have to do with the first, and one or two belated or precocious members of the third. The second and the main body of the third will occupy us in the next Book.

Divisions of eighteenth-century verse.

Alexander Pope[1]—within certain narrow but impregnable limits one of the greatest masters of poetic form that the world has ever seen, and a considerable, though sometimes over-rated, satirist—was

[1] The standard library edition of Pope is that of Elwin and Courthope, with an exhaustive *Life* by the latter, 11 vols. London, 1870-89. The "Globe" edition of the *Poems*, by A. W. Ward, is exceptionally valuable.

born in London in 1688, of a respectable tradesman's family. His parents were Roman Catholics, and Pope was rather badly educated in his early youth. From the time when his father moved to Binfield, on the outskirts of Windsor Forest, he seems to have educated himself. The bad health and physical deformity which marred his later life, and to which the disagreeable parts of his character have been traced, with a mixture of reason and charity, are said not to have been congenital. He wrote verse very early; but his extreme untruthfulness makes it very uncertain how much before the date of publication any particular piece was composed. Still, the dates of the *Pastorals* (1709), when he was twenty-one, of the *Essay on Criticism*, two years later, and of *Windsor Forest*, two years later still, establish beyond all question his early command of versification and expression. Even before the earliest of these dates Pope had been introduced to Wycherley and to Walsh, and through them he became acquainted with the rising prose lights of literature—Addison, Steele, and, above all, Swift. These (at least Swift) zealously furthered his scheme of translating the *Iliad*, which was started in 1713, began to appear next year, and was finished in 1720. This, like the *Odyssey*, which followed, and a good deal of which was done by assistants (Fenton and Broome), was published by subscription, and the two brought Pope in not much less than £10,000, a sum which, at the rates of interest then prevailing, and with some paternal property, was enough to put him in affluence for the rest of his life. That life presents little history except a record of disease, publications, and quarrels. It was in 1718 that he established himself at Twickenham, which as headquarters he never afterwards left, and here he died in 1744.

Pope: his life.

The order of his later publications was as follows. *The Rape of the Lock*, published partially in 1712, reappeared during the time of his work on Homer in 1714. He produced an edition of Shakespeare, which could not well be good, in 1728. His satirical powers, which had already been exhibited in fragments, at last took the form of *The Dunciad* (1728-29), a violent attack on the minor writers of the day, with whom Pope fancied that he had the quarrel of Wit against Dulness, while he really had that of an exceedingly irritable poet against reviewers and, in some sense, rivals. Thereafter he fell into a course of half-moral, half-satirical writings—*Epistle to Lord Burlington*, *Essay on Man*, *Imitations of Horace*, *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, etc. (1730-38), which, whether poetry or not, whether philosophy or not, are at any rate the most brilliant examples in English of one particular kind of verse and one particular kind of style. His last important work was an alteration and enlargement of *The Dunciad* (1742-43). Neither changes nor additions

His work.

were by any means always improvements, but the finale of the complete poem is one of the very greatest things that Pope ever wrote, and one of his strongest titles to the name of poet.

That his claims to that name could be disputed probably never entered into the head of any of his contemporaries save his personal foes, nor perhaps into the heart and conscience of any even of these. They were sufficiently numerous, and Pope amply deserved them. His faults, from their evident connection with a sort of childish weakness, invite, and have received, compassion; but to deny them is absurd. Nor were his virtues extremely conspicuous. He is credited with sincere affection for his friends. But there were no two men whom he loved and honoured more than Swift and Bolingbroke, and yet he could not resist playing upon both some of the underhand literary tricks to which he was more addicted than any great man of letters except his contemporary and analogue Voltaire. He lampooned Addison, who had perhaps given him a provocation of which a magnanimous person would have made nothing, while it very possibly had no existence except in his own morbid fancy; and though the lampoon, the "Character of Atticus," is magnificent literature and not quite unjust, it is all the baser ethically for its genius and its justice. He made violent and foolish love to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and being, or thinking himself, snubbed, revenged the snub with vulgar insults which the pen of no gentleman could have ever allowed to flow from it at any time, except that of the literary bravoes of his old friend Wycherley's youth. Even his partisans have allowed a feeling of revolt at the venomous and snobbish delight with which he dwells at once on the poverty and the dinnerlessness of his Grub Street foes. He was stingy in entertaining (a very rare fault for his time); he had, with no motive to save, odd tricks of writing on backs of letters and scraps of paper; he had many minor faults. Yet those of his friends with whom he did not quarrel never quarrelled with him, and it would be unfair to ask whether it was policy or generosity which made him invariably favourable to rising young men of letters—Thomson and Johnson are the great and sufficient, though by no means the only, examples who made their appearance in his time—provided only they did not join the real or imagined army of Diabolus in Grub Street. He was a very good son; his passion for Martha Blount—a passion by which, whether she requited it well or not, the object benefited most handsomely—seems to have been faithful and intense; and though troublesome to his inferiors and servants from his infirmities, he seems to have been liked by them.

His character.

But his character, save for its close connection with his work, matters very little; his literature matters very much. The greater

jars of the conflict over the question "Was Pope a poet?" have mostly ceased. Hardly anybody now would dream of denying that he was a poet; very few would assert that he was one of the greatest kind. Some indeed have challenged for himself the phrase "Return to nature" which has generally been applied to the revolters from him. The argument, which lacks neither ingenuity nor plausibility, is that from the Elizabethan time to the Pindaric imitators of Cowley a non-natural exaggeration had been a curse, if not *the* curse, of English poetry, and that Pope finally abolished this. Unluckily, however, Cleveland had been dead for fifty years when Pope wrote; Dryden had "appealed to sense" long before he was born; and the prevalent faults of the time immediately preceding were not those of unnatural conceit. Even had it been otherwise, the nature to which he returned was, in all but one respect, a nature of prose, not of poetry. He did refine, to the utmost possible extent, one special kind of verse, and this—perhaps this only—establishes his claim to be a poet. Those who hold that though (to their sorrow) there may be verse without poetry, there cannot be poetry without verse, are not the least trusty guardians of Pope's position. He may be open to attack on other sides; here the defence may laugh at any assault.

His poetry.

Pope's extraordinary mastery of a certain refinement on the Drydenian couplet, which, losing not a little strength and colour, and something of that portion of the poetic vague which Dryden retained, added an incomparable lightness and polish, seems to have been attained very early. In the *Essay on Criticism* it is nearly as advanced, if not quite as sure, as in the satires of thirty years later. The secret, so far as there is a single one, is the gradual discarding of all licenses and easements in the couplet itself—triplets and Alexandrines, the *enjambement* which even Dryden sometimes permitted himself, and the structure of the paragraph by any other than sense-methods. This last is, of course, an important exception, and it speaks volumes for Pope's skill that he can, by means of the sense merely, connect together strings of couplets of which, by no means infrequently, each is complete in itself in rhythm as in meaning. But he sacrifices every attraction of form to the couplet—light, bright, glittering, varied in a manner almost impossible to account for, tipped ever with the neatest, smartest, sharpest rhyme, and volleying on the dazzled, though at times at any rate satiated, reader a sort of salvo of *feux-d'artifice*, skipping, crackling, scattering colour and sound all round and about him. If we take a paragraph of Milton's with one of Pope's, and compare the apparent variety of the constituent stones of the one building with the apparent monotony of those of the other, the difference may

His couplet and paragraph.

be at first quite bewildering. One of Dryden's, between the two, will partly, though not entirely, solve the difficulty by showing how the law of the prose paragraph, that of meaning, is brought to supply the place of that of the pure poetic paragraph, the composition of sound and music.

Pope's other engine for attaining his effect was phraseology, in which he displays the same exquisite, though limited, perfection. Here, again, of the remoter and rarer graces of style there are none. Pope suggests little; no conjunction of his words causes the "wild surprise" given by the phrase of Chaucer, and by those of an unbroken succession from Spenser to Dryden. So also (in this point inferior to his friends Addison and Swift) he has little humour. But his wit is of the finest, and everything that he wishes to say, everything that comes within his purview as proper to be said, is expressed with unequalled propriety. It is impossible to improve on Pope; to get something better you must change the kind. Nor can there be much doubt that, in the negative as in the positive sides of this perfection, he is indebted to that process of conscious or unconscious conventionalising which all his time adored and which he brought to its acme. The individual and particular graces of the literature before and after his century give a nobler gust, but it is hit or miss with them. Pope's process—of extracting and representing the best thought within his compass in the best words that his own genius (still careful of the common) could achieve—is lower but surer. He cannot (or can but very rarely when transported by private passion, as in the "Character of Atticus," or by the contagion of a greater genius, as in that conclusion of *The Dunciad*, which is Swift done into poetry) give the greatest things. But what he can give he gives quite unerringly; he is a secure and impeccable master of his own craft.

His phrase.

With so peculiar a genius as this (for it would be absurd to stint Pope to the word "talent," though some logical defence might be made for it) his subject could not but be of the greatest importance, while even his treatment of matters was necessarily conditioned by his knowledge. In the subjects of the *Pastorals*, of the *Messiah*, of *Windsor Forest*,[1] he was not really at home, and all these are in consequence mere *pastiches*—things immensely clever but no more. In the *Essay on Criticism* the subject itself was thoroughly congenial. Pope knew his own ideal of literature, could express that ideal critically as few could, and express it constructively as could no other man in the world. But he was a very bad judge of other styles and other ideals, and his knowledge of literary as of other

His subjects.

[1] Wordsworth, usually unjust to Pope, has been too generous to this poem. It gives literally nothing of the Forest or of the Thames Valley: a library and a poulterer's shop would furnish all its material.

history would have disgraced the meanest hack in his own fancied Grub Street.[1] Consequently, here and wherever else he touches the subject, we get the most ridiculous statements of fact and the most absurd arguments based upon them, side by side with maxims and judgments worthy of almost any signature in sense, and expressed as no one but Pope could express them in form.

And this difference holds throughout. The *Iliad*, for instance, a wonderful *tour de force* of literature, has long become merely a curiosity, because if we want Homer we go either to himself or to a translator who has some sense of him. The *Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady* and the *Eloisa to Abelard*, again, are both marred, though not ruined, by the prevalence of conventionalism in reference to subjects which, above all others, refuse and defy convention. But *The Rape of the Lock*, artificial as it is, is a perfect triumph of artifice, a piece with which no fault can be found except the frequency of the gradus-epithet, and in which the gradus-epithet is excused by its suitableness to the persons and the manners handled.

Yet it is in his later *Essay*, his *Epistles*, his *Satires*, his *Dunciad* that Pope's genius shows at its very greatest. They are no doubt mosaics—the "Atticus" passage was pretty certainly written twenty years before its insertion in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*—but this is no defect in them. Their value for meaning varies according as Pope was copying optimism from Bolingbroke, pessimism from Swift, and a very remarkable kind of orthodoxy from Warburton, or was giving expression to his own keen, though, alas! limited, observation of society, his personal feelings, and his narrow but clear theory of life and literature. Here he reigns triumphant. His philosophy may be always shallow and sometimes mere nonsense; his satire may lack the large Olympian sweep of Dryden; but he looked on society, and on humanity as that society happened for the time to express it, with an unclouded eye, and he expressed his views with a pen that never stumbled, never made slips of form, and always said the right thing in the right way, when we once accept scheme and time and man.

Pope, a young man at his beginnings but very precocious, began to be copied, or to be revolted from, with almost unexampled earliness; but the imitators and rebels may best be left for future treatment. Of his contemporaries and yoke-fellows, we have noticed Swift and Addison; Garth, Blackmore, Prior, Congreve, Gay, Parnell, Young, a few minors, and—a friendly but, though she knew it not, deadly foe—Lady Winchelsea, shall follow.

[1] His *Selecta Poemata Italorum* (2 vols. London, 1740, though said by some to be only re-edited after Atterbury), with the remarks in Spence's *Anecdotes*, claim exception for the Italian-Latin poetry of the Renaissance.

Samuel Garth,[1] a strong Whig, but popular with both parties, and of very great repute as a physician, was born at Bolam in Durham as early as 1660, went to Cambridge (Peterhouse), where he remained till he took his M.D. in 1691, and spent the rest of his life practising in London. He was the friend, physician, and interrer of Dryden, was familiar with all the Queen Anne men, was knighted at George I.'s accession, and died in 1718. Garth owes his place in English literature, which ought to be no mean one, to the fact that his poem *The Dispensary* was published in 1699 before Dryden's death, and that its versification makes advances on Dryden's own in Pope's direction. Its subject, a doctors' quarrel, does not give us much amusement now, though it has some interest as starting a long line of more or less similar poems on less or more unpromising subjects during the century. Garth followed it up many years later, after he had strengthened *The Dispensary* itself with some of its best parts, by a poem on *Claremont*, and translated some Ovid. But the help which he gave to the perfecting of the couplet in this form is his title to memory. Garth.

The most notorious verse-writer, after Garth, of the interregnum between Pope and Dryden was the luckless Sir Richard Blackmore, one of the small and curious company who have been made immortal by their satirists. Born about 1650, at Corsham, in Wilts, he spent a long time at Oxford, and afterwards took his M.D. at Padua. He had a good practice, and the "*Quack* Maurus" of Dryden, whom he censured and who hit back, does not appear to have had any special justification. He seems to have begun to write verse to pass the time as he drove from patient to patient, and he published the long poems of *Prince Arthur* (1695), *King Arthur* (1697), *Job* (1700), *Eliza* (1705), and *Creation* (1712), besides essays, psalms, etc. He died in 1729, having been still more unmercifully ridiculed by the wits of the second generation. *Creation*,[2] however, was highly praised, not merely by Addison, to whom piety and Whiggery combined would have been an irresistible bribe, but by Johnson, to whom the second quality would have neutralised the first. It is difficult for a reader of the present day to share their admiration. *Creation* supplies (as, for the matter of that, do the other poems, so far as the present writer knows them) tolerable rhetoric in verse occasionally not bad. But this is a different thing from poetry. Blackmore's couplets are often enjambed; and it seems (indeed he boasted of it) that he knew little of the popular poetry of his day. Blackmore.

Congreve[1] deserves such a niche as he has in purely poetical

[1] Garth and Congreve, with all the writers that follow except Lady Winchelsea, are in Chalmers.

[2] In Chalmers, vol. x.; the rest must be sought in the originals.

history as the producer of a few songs very much in the character of those mentioned earlier as the last product of the Cavalier muse, but with more of the order and neatness of the eighteenth century. He is sometimes impudent, but rarely, like the Dorsets and the Sedleys, merely coarse, and the note of the careless fine gentleman which he so much affected in his life does appear in his poems, especially by comparison with Prior, whom, though he falls far short of him in nature, tenderness, whimsical wit, and suspicion of higher and deeper feeling, he excels in that indescribable and sometimes denied, but quite real, quality called breeding. Ambrose Philips and Thomas Tickell were both friends of Addison and (whether of their own choice or as a result of Pope's irritable vanity is uncertain) enemies of Pope. The former—to be carefully distinguished from John Philips (1676-1708), author of the admirable Miltonic burlesque of *The Splendid Shilling* and of a good poem, or at least verse-essay, on *Cider*—was born in Leicestershire in 1671, and died in London in 1749. His short sentimental verses to children gained him from Carey (the author of "Sally in our Alley") the nickname of "Namby-Pamby," which has passed into the language as a common epithet. Tickell, a Cumberland man and a Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford (1676-1740), is chiefly remembered for two splendid couplet-elegies on Addison (whose devoted friend he was) and on Marlborough's lieutenant Cadogan. The majesty which this particular form could put on has seldom been better shown, except in the final lines of *The Dunciad*. But we must turn to men of more poetical substance.

Congreve, etc.

Matthew Prior,[1] the king of "verse of society" in English, was born near Wimborne in 1664, and was educated at Westminster, going thence to Cambridge, but to St. John's, not, as usual with his schoolfellows, to Trinity. He took his degree in 1686, and obtained a Fellowship, which he kept through life, and which kept him at some times of it. He wrote a bad parody of *The Hind and the Panther* in conjunction with Montague, afterwards Halifax, but did nothing else till he was of middle age, though he enjoyed to the full the copious if transient stream of patronage of men of letters, which his coadjutor did much to set running. He was even Ambassador to France; was deeply engaged in the still obscure intrigues which just failed to seat James III. on the throne of England at his sister's death; is suspected of having turned king's evidence, but was imprisoned for some years. He had published

Prior.

[1] In Chalmers, and common in editions from his own gorgeous folio downwards. Mr. Austin Dobson's *Selected Poems of Prior* (London, 1889) is admirable; but for the bulk, including much new matter, we must go to Mr. A. R. Waller's two volumes in the "Cambridge Classics."

poems in 1709, and issued another collection in splendid form after his liberation in 1718. He did not long survive this, and died in 1721. He was, though an intimate, somewhat of a detached intimate of the literary society of his time, and is said frankly to have preferred less distinguished associates.

The works of Prior are rather numerous than voluminous, and they are very curiously assorted. The only pieces of any bulk are *Alma, or the Progress of the Mind*, and *Solomon, or the Vanity of the World*. The first, divided into three cantos, is an extremely fantastic, though, according to most (not all) critics, somewhat tedious poem in Hudibrastic verse, and quite openly imitating Butler in style as well as in metre. Although, however, the guise is burlesque, the subject-matter is by no means wholly so; and Prior, the lightness of whose best known work has perhaps rather obscured the fact that he was a scholar and a man of no small reading, has put a good deal of thought as well as of learning in an ill-chosen fashion. *Solomon*, which is also in three divisions (here called "books"), is in heroic couplets of a rather Drydenian than Popian cast, with frequent Alexandrines. Here too the poem is much better worth reading than is usually thought; but the author's inability to be frankly serious again shows itself. His treatment of Vanity has neither the bitter quintessence of Swift, nor the solemn and sometimes really tragic declamation of Young, nor that intense conviction and ethical majesty which make Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* almost a great poem, and beyond all question a great piece of literature. His next most important works in point of bulk are a handful of tales after the manner of La Fontaine, for which the rigid Johnson himself made a famous excuse, but which, though they contain some of their author's earliest and pleasantest writing, make their appearance not at all, or with considerable difficulty and adjustment, in modern volumes intended for general reading. Longer than these, indeed, are the *Carmen Seculare*, a dull Pindaric to William the Deliverer, and *Henry and Emma*, an ill-judged modernising of the exquisite *Nut-brown Maid*, but they form no part of Prior's title to fame.

This, which is completely indefeasible, rests upon a cloud of bright trifles, or things pretty serious within but bright and trifling in appearance, heterogeneous enough in subject and form, but all animated by the same dainty, whimsical touch in metre, phrase, and poetic style. He can be merely sentimental and achieve mere sentiment charmingly; impudently but triumphantly caricaturing, as in his parody of Boileau's fustian on the taking of Namur; arch, in the best sense of that almost obsolete and long misused but really useful word, as in a hundred pieces of which "Cloe and Euphelia"

stands perhaps first in order in his collected works; deliberately but exquisitely trivial, as in "The Secretary." Prior has never been approached in the lighter love-poem of a certain kind, such as "The Lover's Anger," or "Dear Cloe, how blubbered is that pretty face!" For all his easy morality, no juster, shrewder, and more good-natured life-philosophy was ever put than in "An English Padlock." What may be more surprising to those who do not see from the first that Prior was no mere wit but a true humorist, is that his gaiety can, with an imperceptible turn, admit a real and a most melancholy wisdom, as in the beautiful and justly famous "Lines written in the beginning of Mezeray's History of France." In the mere epigram, such as those on Dr. Radcliffe, on Bibo, and others, where only wit is wanted, he is supreme; his verses to children, especially the famous "Child of Quality," defy competition; the "Epitaph on Jack and Joan" shows, like some other things of his, how keen a knowledge of humanity underlay his apparently frivolous ways; and in "Down Hall," the narrative of a trip into Essex, he set an example of lighter narrative verse in easy anapæstics which has been regularly followed, and perhaps never improved upon, since.

His metrical importance.

This last brings us to one of Prior's greatest historical merits. The tyranny of the couplet was severe enough on the eighteenth century as it was. But it would have been worse still if this poet, influential in position and friendships, attractive in subject, and of an exquisite skill in his art, had not evaded that tyranny by writing verse for lighter purposes in anapæstic measures, in the octosyllable, and in various lyric forms. The four-footed anapæstic, in particular, may be said to have almost owed its matriculation in the list of permitted metres to Prior. Dryden had used it, but chiefly in compositions intended definitely for music, in which it was no novelty, having been used for ballads and songs time out of mind. But it had been regarded as a sort of "blind fiddler's measure"—good enough for "Drolleries" and "Garlands" and so forth, but scarcely worthy of "The Muses." Prior accomplished its presentation to these punctilious divinities once for all. Henceforward the correctest poet felt that there was no crime in now and then deserting couplet for these freer measures; and as a matter of fact we find in them by far the larger part of the real poetry of the eighteenth century.

Something of the same beneficent influence was exercised by John Gay,[1] who, though a far less exquisite and original poet than Prior,

[1] Very popular in the eighteenth century; a little neglected later. Amends, however, have recently been made in two very pretty editions, of the *Fables* by Mr. Austin Dobson (London, 1882), and of the whole *Poems* by Mr. Underhill (2 vols. London, 1893).

had perhaps more special sympathy for the country, as opposed to the town, than "Dear Mat." He was born in the same year (1688) with Pope, at Barnstaple, in the county which contains the most exquisite mixture of scenery in England, but he seems to have thought himself more at home

Gay.

Where Catherine Street descends into the Strand

than on the banks of the Taw or in the hill-solitudes of its springs. His family was no ill one, but poor, and he was apprenticed to a silk mercer in London. From this unpromising occupation he passed to that of secretary to the Duchess of Monmouth, Anne Scott, the "charming Annabel" of Dryden. In 1713 he published a poem on "Rural Sports," containing some description more vivid and direct than the age generally showed, and dedicated it to Pope. Introduction to the wits and the patrons followed, and Gay had a small share, and apparently might have had, but for laziness and indiscretion, a larger one, in the golden shower still falling on men of letters. The same qualities prevented him from making his fortune in the South Sea Bubble—for Craggs gave him stock, he would not sell during the craze, and lost everything—and perhaps contributed to defeat his expectations from George II. But he was one of those fortunate, helpless persons whom everybody helps, and the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry took him into their household, managed his money for him (he made a good deal by the *Beggar's Opera*), and prevented him from having any need of it. He died at the end of 1732, too lazy even to make a will. The traditional character of him as of a kind of human lapdog, without any vice except extreme self-indulgence, has been little disturbed.

His earliest poem, *Wine*, published some years before that above noticed, in 1708, belongs to the same class as John Philips's pieces, clever enough Miltonic parody. In *Rural Sports* he shifted to the inevitable couplet, which again he wrote well; in fact, Gay did nothing ill, he only wanted initiation and distinction. *The Shepherd's Week* (1714) relapsed on parody, the subject being now Virgil and Spenser, or rather the namby-pamby imitators of both. The mock-heroic couplets of this are often happy, if not very strong. But Gay's skill in this kind reached its acme in *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1715), which is one of the most vivid things of the sort ever done, and for all its rather teasing falsetto, remains a document for the subject and a pleasant poem in itself. His *Epistles* exhibit the same pleasing, if somewhat uninspired, accomplishment, and his *Eclogues* might sometimes be Pope and sometimes Young. It is more to his real credit that he had a lyrical gift possessed by neither

of these, his greater contemporaries. The immortal, if conventional, "Black-Eyed Susan," the more genuine "'Twas when the seas were roaring," the most musical "Phyllida" song, and a great many others, have sometimes more sweetness than Prior, though seldom as much air and fire. His dramatic pieces, *Acis and Galatea*, and still more the *Beggar's Opera*, are yet unforgotten. He wrote Tales, again very like Prior's; and lastly, there are his once universally, and still widely, known *Fables*. They have been for some time neglected, which is a pity, for they are perennial sense expressed in good, though not quite perennial, verse. Gay could do almost anything that his friends told him to do or that he had a model for; but he required these assistances.

Young.

With Edward Young[1] we come to a poet of greater originality and force, but of much less equal achievement, than Gay, a poet who in more ways than one represents a development independent of Pope, and to some extent reactionary from the movement which Pope represented. Young was not merely Pope's senior; he actually, in the *Universal Passion* (1725-28), preceded that writer in his special form of satire, and did nearly, if not quite, as well in it as Pope himself at his very best. But the major part of his work is of a kind very different from Pope's. He was born in Hampshire in the year 1681, went to Oxford, and obtaining (at All Souls) one of the then very rare Fellowships which were not necessarily clerical, did not take orders till late in life. He is said to have at last done so from ambition, and disappointment in his hopes of preferment is credited with at least part of the gloom of the *Night-Thoughts*. He did not die till 1765, having published verse, *Resignation*, as late as three years earlier. He was a playwright, and his play of *The Revenge* was long very popular. His non-dramatic verse is copious, and its merit varies in the strangest degree.

Young's first poem was *The Last Day*, published in 1713. It, like *The Force of Religion*, which followed it a year later, is in couplets, and both poems display Young's peculiar and, to modern tastes, not very pleasant mixture of probably sincere, but gloomy and bombastically expressed, religious awe, together with an exaggeration of that flattery of "the great" on earth which seventeenth and eighteenth century feeling permitted, if it did not actually demand. There are, however, very fine things in *The Last Day*, and it is the best piece on any great scale that he did, except the *Night-Thoughts*. *The Force of Religion*, on the story of Lady Jane Grey and her husband, is mawkish and sometimes ridiculous. There could be few

[1] In Chalmers, but not recently edited as a whole.

greater contrasts than the seven satires of *Love of Fame, or the Universal Passion*, which followed at about ten years' interval. As observed above, Pope is anticipated, and all but equalled, in these vigorous compositions, where the artificiality of the treatment is excused by that of the subjects, and where Young shows himself a past master, not merely of the crack but of the sting, of the couplet lash. Then we come upon *Ocean, an Ode* (1728), which, like all Young's other odes (*Imperium Pelagi*, 1729, etc.), affords examples, hard to be excelled in the works of the meanest writers, of the unintentional mock heroic, and then to *The Complaint, or Night-Thoughts.*

It is difficult to give even a guess whether this remarkable poem will ever recover much or anything of the great reputation which it long held, and which, for two generations at least, it has almost entirely lost. It has against it, the application of phrase and even of thought, merely of an age, to the greatest and most lasting subjects, and a tone only to be described as the theatrical-religious. Its almost unbroken gloom frets or tires according to the mood and temperament of the reader. On the other hand, the want of sincerity is always more apparent than real, and the moral strength and knowledge of human nature, which were the great merits of the eighteenth century, appear most unmistakably. Above all, the poem deserves the praise due to very fine and, in part at least, very original versification. If Young here deserts the couplet, it is, as we have seen, by no means because he cannot manage it; it is because he is at least partly dissatisfied with it, and sees that it will not serve his turn. And his blank verse is a fine and an individual kind. Its fault, due, no doubt, to his practice in drama, is that it is a little too declamatory, a little too suggestive of soliloquies in an inky cloak with footlights in front. But this of itself distinguishes it from the blank verse of Thomson, which came somewhat earlier. It is not a direct imitation either of Milton or of Shakespeare, and deserves to be ranked by itself. The *Night-Thoughts*, which were late (1742-44), were at once Young's best work and his last good work. *Resignation* is much weaker, but not quite dotage.

Thomas Parnell[1] may also be classed as an unconscious rebel. He was of a good Cheshire family, but was born in Dublin in 1679; entered Trinity College, took his degree and orders, and in 1705 was made Archdeacon of Clogher. Swift introduced him to Harley and converted him to Toryism, but the change of dynasty made his conversion infructuous, though Swift procured further preferment for him from Archbishop King. He is

Parnell.

[1] Ed. Aitken, London, 1894.

said to have felt the death of his wife very severely, and himself died young in 1717.

It is curious that, out of the small bulk of Parnell's poetical work, poetical criticism of the most various times and tastes has been able to pick quite different things to sustain his reputation. The famous "Hermit" has kept its place in all anthologies; Goldsmith extolled the translations, and Johnson endorsed his views, though he himself liked the "Allegory on Man" best. And later censorship, which finds the "Hermit" not much more than a smooth and ingenious exercise in verse, and the translations and imitations unimportant, has lavished praise on two small pieces, "The Night-Piece on Death" and the "Hymn to Contentment," the former of which certainly displays nature-painting of a kind unknown in the work of any but one contemporary, while the return of the second to the *Comus* alternation of trochaic and iambic cadence is an almost equally important, though doubtless unintended, protest against the ceaseless iambs of the couplet. It is not possible to call Parnell a great poet as he stands; but the quality and the variety of his accomplishment show that in slightly different circumstances and in other times he would probably have been one.

The other exception, a notice of whom may fitly conclude this chapter and this Book, was Anne, Countess of Winchelsea. Lady Winchelsea was the daughter of Sir William Kingsmill, and was born in Hampshire about the time of the Restoration. She died sixty years later in 1720, having been a friend of the wits (she is Pope's Ardelia) and herself a considerable practitioner in verse. She wrote *The Spleen*, a Pindaric ode (1701), *The Prodigy* (1706), *Miscellany Poems* (1714), the publication which, almost by a lucky accident, has revived her memory, and a tragedy, *Aristomenes*. The accident referred to was the mention of her by Wordsworth in his famous polemical essay appended to the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1815, where he excepts her *Nocturnal Reverie* (with an odd companion, Pope's *Windsor Forest*) from his sweeping denunciation of the poetry between *Paradise Lost* and *The Seasons*, as "not containing a single new image of external nature." The statement is not by any means true, or rather its exaggeration swamps what truth it has, but the commendation of Lady Winchelsea is deserved. It is a pity that her poems have not been reprinted and are difficult of access, for it is desirable to read the whole in order to appreciate the unconscious clash of style and taste in them.[1]

Lady Winchelsea.

It is not a little noteworthy that Lady Winchelsea began as a Pindaric writer. The imitators of Cowley (unless Dryden is classed

[1] The *Reverie* and some other pieces will be found in Ward's *Poets*, vol. iii.

among them) have been not altogether unjustly regarded as having furnished one of the most uninviting divisions of English poetry, and it is no doubt in part due to them that the couplet, as a revolt, obtained its sway. But Cowley, though even in him the high and passionate spirit of the earlier poetry was dropping and falling, still preserved something of it, and "flights" were necessary to a Pindaric. Fortunately for Lady Winchelsea, natural taste and the opportunities of life seem to have inclined her to take natural objects as the source of her imagery. What place suggested the *Nocturnal Reverie* we cannot say, but it is clearly a corrected impression and not merely conventional. It is all *seen:* the waving moon on the river, the sleepy cowslip, the foxglove, paler than by day, but chequering still with red the dusky brakes, and the wonderful image of the horse, take us almost a century away from the drawing-rooms and the sham shepherdesses of her contemporaries. And she could manage the shortened octosyllable even better than Parnell, could adjust the special epithet (Pope borrowed or stole "aromatic pain" from her, though probably she took it from Dryden's "aromatic splinters"). Altogether she is a most remarkable phenomenon, too isolated to point much of a moral, but adorning the lull of early eighteenth-century poetry with images even more correct than Thomson's, and put in language far less artificial.[1]

[1] *Note to Third Edition.*—William Somerville (1677-1742), the author of *The Chase*, 1734, has been accidentally overlooked. A country squire, and practical sportsman, but something of a scholar (he was a Fellow of New College, Oxford), Somerville was not ill qualified to treat the subject of his chief poem (for he also wrote others). It is a little artificial, but not more so than might be expected; and its versification, though resembling Thomson's, is in no sense merely imitative thereof.

INTERCHAPTER VIII

In hardly any period of English literature (though the old caution as to the constant overlapping of tendencies, the constant or regular coincidence of the receding and flowing tides, has still to be repeated) are the general characteristics so distinct and so uniform as in that which has been surveyed in the Book just concluded. Survivors of the older poetry and prose reach, in actual life, to within a very few years of the birth of forerunners of styles not yet extinct—nay, by the help of a nondescript like Lady Winchelsea, it may be said that there is no breach of continuity, even in nature-poetry of the strictest kind, from *Appleton House* to *Grongar Hill*. But always the exceptions, though in the time, are not of it; always those who are of the time show one complexion in poetry, in prose, and, at bottom, in drama. Yet even the nature of that complexion has not been entirely undisputed, and the name of it has been the subject of much contest. We need not concern ourselves with such question-begging, clumsy, and yet incomplete appellatives as "Gallo-Classic." This is the really important question—Is it just to call the age from 1660 to 1740 eminently, the age from 1660 to 1800 more or less, an "Age of Prose" in the depreciatory sense, and to deny to Dryden and to Pope the title of classics of our poetry? And we may answer it shortly. It is just to call the Augustan age, or ages, ages, by comparison, of prose; it is not just to deny to them, and especially to their greatest representatives, a share, though again by comparison, of poetry.

At the Restoration the country unquestionably turned to business. It had not quite done with its religious, its constitutional, its dynastic strifes. It was not to have finished with the first, even generally, for some years, with the second for some decades, with the third till a period actually later than the death of Pope and coincident with that of Swift. But it was in the mind to have done with them, to let "the great questions" alone, to turn to shop and merchandise, to "projects," to practical studies, and while by no means abandoning philosophy, to take the most practical branches of that art—ethics,

politics, the grosser psychology. It wanted literary media that would suit these purposes, that would accord with scientific treatises, histories, business accounts of voyage and travel telling where a man might traffic in bays and says, summaries of the news and the affairs of the day. It had no objection to poetry as such, but insensibly its poetry took the same complexion ; and after, by a sort of reaction, trying the most extravagant, though hardly the most poetical, kind of tragedy or drama ever seen, it relapsed upon a comedy artificial indeed, but artificial not in the least in the direction of the ideal.

In all three departments the tendency was shown most of all by the creation of a new style—of a style in which poetry and prose drew together in an almost unnatural alliance. The quest of the unadorned becomes almost fanatical, and, as we have seen, sometimes becomes a mere acquiescence in the down-at-heel. Only in the lower rhetoric is bedizenment sought—save for Irony, the sole one of the greater figures which almost necessitates simplicity. Fancy, provided she knows her place, is tolerated ; but Imagination is kept well at a distance ; a flight is perdition, a conceit at best danger. Above all, a sort of crusade is preached and practised against the individual ; and the general (which rapidly becomes the conventional) is alone orthodox. To understand the period, perhaps there is no better way than to read those papers of Addison's on the Imagination, which some persons have strangely taken as if the word were used as Coleridge might have used it. The Imagination, we find, is that which supplies images ; and her supply is to be strictly limited to what the senses prove and what correct tradition approves.

These characteristics of the time are not really deniable : it cannot be seriously contended, except as a matter of rhetorical "colour," that in passing from Shakespeare through Dryden to Pope, we do not pass from the upper through the middle air to earth. But it is by no means necessary, while granting this, to belittle, much less to abuse, the Augustan ages. They had their own work to do and they did it—a good deal better perhaps than some ages which have announced more ambitious tasks. They had, in the first place, to get English grammar settled for prose use at least ; to establish something like a recognised dictionary, and to elaborate something like fixed rules of composition—something which would dissuade the greater writers from attempting the vagaries of Clarendon and Milton, and safeguard the smaller from the disasters into which men like Milton and Clarendon could never wholly fall. They had, even in poetry, to create a sort of etiquette which should prevent even really fine poetic frenzy from describing the eyes of the Magdalene as walking baths and compendious oceans ; to add to the metrical exercises of English a course of the neat, smart, limited

drill which was the only gymnastic it had yet lacked; to get, as a reaction from this, the wholly trisyllabic metres (hitherto neglected) into order for comic work first and then for serious.

And all this they did. They did not (as Johnson thought in Dryden's case) "find Rome of brick and leave it of marble"; but they did find the literary city ill organised, unpoliced, with none of these contemned arrangements for "gas and water" which add so much to the convenience of life. And they did leave it very fairly drained, paved, lighted, watered, and equipped with constables. Nor had they much to be ashamed of in regard to the actual edifices which they added. To speak of the verse of Dryden with any kind of contempt or belittlement is to go very near the absurd. The same may be said of the best verse-couplet of Pope and the best light verse of Prior; each, like Dryden, is supreme in his own way. Nor must we say much less of the prose of Addison and of Berkeley, while we must say a great deal more of Swift. His life practically covered the entire time, and who shall say that a time throughout the whole of which Swift was living need vail its bonnet in the presence of any time ancient or modern?

Yet it may be admitted that, though it could produce great men and even greatest, this production was not its own special business. Its business was to do what has been described above, and moreover to extend the domains of literature, by opening up fresh provinces and arranging equipment for settling them. It allowed nothing to die, though it certainly left the drama in a state of perilously suspended animation. On the contrary, it saw, though only in the beginning, the revival of much and the positive admission of more. It got the Essay thoroughly into shape; it left the novel and the regular history born, or just ready to be born; it set flying new species of lighter verse; and it saw at least several further developments of periodical literature, though not the fullest.

Above all, it shaped, to a degree not yet much bettered, the lighter form of English verse, and it arranged, in a manner not yet altered in essentials at all, the general form of English prose. It would be scarcely paradox to say that, on the whole, we have rather reverted, and diverged from our points of reversion, than made any positive advances since the deaths of Pope and Swift. We have, at any rate, been much more indebted to the past, much less original in our apparently most daring innovations, than were the patronised, the pitied, the not seldom abused and despised, "ages of prose and sense."

BOOK IX

MIDDLE AND LATER EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE POETS FROM THOMSON TO CRABBE

Thomson—His life—His minor poems—*The Seasons*—*The Castle of Indolence*—Dyer—Blair and Green—Shenstone—Collins—Gray—Byrom, Savage, and others—Akenside—Resurrection of the Ballad: Percy and others—Dodsley's *Miscellany*—Smart—Mason—Falconer—The Wartons—Churchill—Chatterton—Beattie—Langhorne and Mickle—Cowper—Crabbe—Blake—Burns—His predecessors from Ramsay to Fergusson—His poetic quality.

JAMES THOMSON, the first Scotsman after the Union to contribute matter of very great value to English literature, was born in September 1700 at Ednam, in Roxburghshire. His grandfather had been only a gardener, his father was minister of the parish, and had married Beatrix Trotter, daughter of a yeoman proprietor. Very shortly after Thomson's birth, his father was transferred to Southdean, a parish in the same county, but nearer the Border, in fact, on the Scottish slopes of the Cheviots. There is no doubt that much of Thomson's hardly-excelled knowledge of natural aspects was obtained here; the sterner part certainly was. He was educated at a school in Jedburgh, whence, at the age of fifteen, he went to the University of Edinburgh; and as his father soon after died, the family moved to that city. Thomson's stay at Edinburgh, as then usual in the case of divinity students, was a prolonged one—some nine years; but he had little vocation, and in 1725 went to London to seek his fortune. He had some initial difficulties, but his college friend David Malloch, or Mallet, helped him, and before long he became tutor in Lord Binning's family. *Winter* was published in March 1726, was

Thomson.

successful from the first, and brought him many friends (including Pope) and patrons. He continued *The Seasons* (*Summer*, 1727; *Spring*, 1728), which were finished with *Autumn* in 1730, wrote some bad tragedies (especially *Sophonisba*, 1729), and went with a pupil on the Continent. His tour seems to have furnished him with the materials of his *Liberty* (1734-6).

His life.

It was in 1733 that Lord Chancellor Talbot, father of his pupil (who was now dead), appointed Thomson to a post in Chancery, which he only lost through negligence, and which was the first of a series of appointments, pensions, and the like (the chief being the surveyorship of the Leeward Islands), sufficient to keep him in comfort for the rest of his life. This was passed near Richmond, a literary neighbourhood as well as one congenial to a lover of nature. The extreme indolence which is the best-known feature of his later years sometimes exposed him to difficulties, and he was unfortunate in a late, and perhaps rather lukewarm, passion for a certain Miss Young, "Amanda." He died in 1748. Like Gay and other men of letters of the time, both English and French, Thomson seems to have deserved Cowley's description of the grasshopper as an "Epicurean animal." Initiative was not his forte, even *Winter* seems to have been suggested by similarly named poems of an early friend, one Riccaltoun. But no vice at all detestable seems to have been charged, much less proved, against him. The eighteenth century was a bad time for men of his temperament, and its early years, in which the brilliant luck of Addison and Prior, and the great money gains of Pope, served by turns to encourage and dishearten, were particularly bad for men of letters. If Thomson's inertia could be, as it has sometimes been, charged to Miss Young's unkindness, he might be a little more interesting, but it seems to have begun earlier; and after all a want of energy, not improbably constitutional, is no unpardonable sin.

Thomson's poetical works[1] are among the most important in the history of English poetry, though they cannot be exactly ranked among the best of English poems. Appearing as they did at the very same time with the most perfect and polished work of Pope, they served as an antidote to that great writer's "town" poetry. Couched as the best of them were in blank verse, or in the Spenserian stanza, they showed a bold front to the insolent domination of the stopped couplet. Becoming almost instantly popular, and retaining their popularity, they supplied for full seventy years a perpetual

[1] Almost the whole of the poets of this chapter will be found in Chalmers, though not always (notably in the case of Smart's *Song to David*) complete. Many are in the "Aldine Poets," and have been recently and well re-edited. Only important special editions will be noted.

corrective to the least poetical tendencies of the poetry of the day. Nor can there be any doubt that their efficacy in this way was increased by a peculiarity which has lessened their influence and their vogue during the present century. Thomson stood apart from the Augustan school in his subjects of interest, and in his selection of metres. But he shared, and rather went beyond, the predilection of that school for a peculiar stilted "poetic diction," partly founded on the classicalism of Milton, but largely tempered from less genuine sources. Nobody, who has the slightest tincture of catholic poetical taste, can defend such a phrase as—

> See where the winding vale its lavish stores
> *Irriguous* spreads,

which is on a par with the worst fashionable faults of any time. But these phrases baited the hook for his own days, and they can be, except for historical purposes, neglected in these—just as we have already learnt to neglect, and sometimes to enjoy, mediæval stock phrase, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conceit, and as, no doubt, a future time will half-neglect and half-enjoy the tricks on which writers of our own time pride themselves.

His minor poems.

These works comprise three long poems, and a certain, but not large, number of smaller ones. Of the first class a merciful posterity has agreed to forget *Liberty*, though unwise partisans sometimes attempt to drag it out for judgment. The result, before competent judges, can at best be a recommendation to mercy. The piece is a Whig prize-poem, in five parts, dealing consecutively with Italy, Greece, Rome, Britain, and "A Prospect." The vehicle is blank verse of the same pattern as that in which the more artificial passages of *The Seasons* are couched. The sentiment is of that kind which was finally made hateful to gods and men by the orators of the French Revolution—a "dull-snuffling" compound of Brutus and Tully, and the Retreat of the Ten Thousand, King Alfred, and the Immortal Nassau. The Goddess of Liberty is the main speaker through the whole, and sometimes she speaks well. Except by Dryden, the licensed flattery of friends and patrons has seldom been better put than in the exordium dealing with the poet's dead pupil Talbot, and that pupil's father; the picture of the Campagna shows the poet of *The Seasons*; the passage on modern Italy beginning—

> What would you say, ye conquerors of earth!

is declamation become eloquence; the Ten Thousand piece is even better; and the sketch of Roman history in the third book is clever.

But the whole is hopeless. Nor need much be said of the minor poems. Only the delicate and charming, though artificial—

Tell me, thou soul of her I love,

and the graceful "Nuptial Song for Sophonisba," must be excepted from faint praise, or by no means faint condemnation.

The Seasons and *The Castle of Indolence*[1] are an entirely different matter. About neither is any mistake possible to those who know poetry. In the successive editions of *The Seasons* Thomson made many changes, and his editors have not yet fully coped with them. But between the earliest *Winter* of 1726 and the latest complete *Seasons* there are not differences sufficient to interfere with the general position of the book and its author in English poetry. Thomson was not entirely above the cant and fashion of his time, either in thought or in phrase. But his glory and his salvation lay in the fact that he was born with, and had cultivated, the gift of looking straight at nature, and of reporting the result of his observation in words. He never lost this gift. He saw the view from Richmond Hill, and the lazy luxuriance of the Thames Valley, just as inevitably and unmistakingly as he had seen the snowstorms of the Carter and the spates of the Jed. He had such a genius at the thing that, even in describing what he had never seen—the merely book-learnt scenes of foreign countries—he is not much, though somewhat, less convincing than when he touches off the wallflower, or the birds at the approach of rain, or the disturbance of the trout by sheep-washing. In a thousand casual strokes, as well as in the well-known set pieces of *The Seasons*, this infallible observation, and this admirable if not always consummate expression show themselves. As compositions, all the four lie, no doubt, open to exception. There is a good deal of padding, and it is often weak. A certain amount of the matter has the cant common to declaimers, and a certain further amount has the sentimentality, the artificiality, and the other faults of the time. But even these, in the company where we find them, add a certain flavour. It is impossible to believe that *The Seasons* will ever be read without admiration and delight by fit persons. They have, if not the charm of the absolutely best and highest literature, yet that of the next, and still not too extensive class, that which combines an excellent adherence to truth of fact with a more than competent skill in art. For their time, and therefore for history, they were of simply paramount importance, but they have a charm not merely of their time.

The Seasons.

[1] The best edition is that of Mr. J. Logie Robertson for the Clarendon Press.

Poetically speaking, Thomson went far higher in *The Castle of Indolence*, which closed, as *Winter* had opened, his poetical career; and it so happened that its lesson was not much less important for his time. Spenser had never wholly gone out of favour,[1] though both Thomson himself and Shenstone (*vide infra*) thought it safest to imitate his "Gothick" form with a touch of burlesque. But the virtue of the magnificent stanza almost completely conquered this; and the charms of *The Castle of Indolence* are not those of a parody, but those of a great poem, which happens to bear the image and superscription of a greater. Almost at once the poet is carried away, and the famous picture of the dale of Indolence is almost as noble a thing as we shall find anywhere in eighteenth-century poetry. The very spirit of the stanza, its long-drawn, sleepy, yet never sluggish melody, passes with the murmuring sound of it into the poet's song. Nor does it ever fully leave him, despite his occasional struggles to get back to falsetto. The Speech of Indolence, itself not wholly couched in this vein, is hardly over before we have the wondrous stanza—

The Castle of Indolence.

As when a shepherd of the Hebrid Isles—

the picture of the Castle, almost worthy of Spenser's self, the Mirror of Vanity (which shows that Thomson was not far behind Young or even Pope himself as a satirist), and the sketches of the guests. The second book is not so continuously good, because (to tell the truth) Thomson had no real sympathy with the Knight of Arts and Industry, while he had much with the fell enchanter; but it completes the moral, without which the age would not have been contented.

It is impossible to exaggerate the beneficent influence which *The Castle of Indolence* must have had in soothing, relaxing, and adjusting to true poetic feeling, the ears and mind of a generation made half-deaf and half-nervous by the sharp scratch and rasp of the couplet. That its Aeolian-harp music did not appeal to Johnson is not in the least surprising; that something of its charm must have in some unexplained way kept him from expressing contempt or blame is very interesting. For it was, in truth, the knell of the kind of poetry he himself loved and practised.

Three short poems, two in octosyllables, one in blank verse, keep

[1] The *nadir* of the taste for him seems to have been about the last thirty years of the seventeenth century. In 1686 a "Person of Quality" "delivered in Heroick numbers" (*i.e.* couplets), as *Spenser Redivivus*, the *Faërie Queene*, Bk. i., with its author's "essential design preserved, but his obsolete language and manner of verse totally laid aside." In order not to do the work negligently, the Person of Quality has also totally laid aside "his" poetry.

alive the memory of three poets, who were all born within a year or two of Thomson, while Dyer's *Grongar Hill*, the most remarkable and the most like his work, appeared in the very year of *Winter*. John Dyer (born *circa* 1698, died 1758) was a native of Caermarthenshire, and at first a painter by profession, but took orders. He wrote later and larger poems—*The Ruins of Rome* (after an actual visit there on his earlier business), *The Fleece*, one of the impossible descriptive-didactics of the century—but by their dates (1740 and 1757), his genuine but thin fount of originality had been swamped by the greater volume and more forceful genius of Thomson. *Grongar Hill*, a little poem of some 200 lines, and the still shorter *Country Walk*, are very different things. They, like Lady Winchelsea's work, remind us more of Marvell than of any later poet. The rhymes in *Grongar Hill* are really "uncertain," and the grammar is sometimes dubious. But the poet sees; he clothes what he sees with atmosphere, and ranges it in composition; his phrase is often singularly fresh and direct, and his versification, though not attempting *Christabel* scope, uses at least the licenses of *Comus*. He was evidently, from his later work, one of those poets who survive their poetry; but he was a poet.

Dyer.

Robert Blair (1699-1743), minister of Athelstaneford, who published *The Grave* in 1743, and Matthew Green (1696-1737), a clerk in the Custom-House, who wrote *The Spleen*, or at least published it, in 1732, were more of their time, but transcended mere convention in each case. The good old Saxon gloom inspires Blair's verse, which has something of the declamation of Young's, but is less florid and more nervous. As for *The Spleen*, it is one of the liveliest poems of a century which has many lively poems—a little Philistine and decidedly hedonist, but shrewd, by no means unkindly, and shading off the indignant satire of its model, Swift, into an easy raillery, which almost masks its contempt of life.

Blair and Green.

The name of Thomson, with those of Gray and Collins, supplies almost the whole poetical list of the greater poets of the middle eighteenth century, and hasty judgment often seeks no farther, if so far. On the other hand, in no period of English literature have minor poets made so secure a hold on memory, owing to the fact of Johnson's *Lives*, and to the enrolment of their works in the excellent collection of Chalmers. Nor is it, perhaps, entirely certain that, from some future standpoint, these poets will seem so inferior to those of the seventeenth and those of the nineteenth century as they seem to us.

There is, at any rate, no lack of interesting matter in William Shenstone.[1] If we took his prose remains, hardly to be called essays

[1] Poems only in Chalmers; *Works*, 3rd ed. 3 vols. London, 1773.

so much as jottings, then we should think him a very considerable though unequal critic, and an innovator of the most remarkable kind. In his actual verse we find him tentative, often feeble, and nearly always incomplete. He was born at the Leasowes, in a part of Worcestershire which technically belonged to Shropshire, in 1714, and the greater part of his life of not quite fifty years (he died in 1763) was passed there, in those attempts to develop and improve the natural beauty of his estate which brought him some fame, some ridicule, and a good deal of pecuniary embarrassment. But he had been educated at Pembroke College, Oxford (which probably made Johnson as kind to him as he could be to any man who liked "prospects"), he had seen something of fashionable society, and he continued to be intimate with persons of rank, as well as with persons of literature. It must never be forgotten that he had much to do with the appearance of Percy's *Reliques*, and would have edited it jointly had his life lasted. But there was on Shenstone the curse which attends all transition poets, aggravated in his case by ill-health, a nature at once shy and appetent of fame, and a fortune which neither provided affluence nor compelled industry. Of the greater poets we can say that in other times they would have been either silent or the same with slight and separable differences; there is probably not a poem of Shenstone's which would not have been a perfectly different thing if he had been born in 1614 or 1814. A batch of elegies, neither unmusical nor thoughtless, but unfortunately artificial in phrase,[1] is followed by a *pot-pourri* of odes, songs, and ballads as artificial, but more graceful, and by attempts in the most various kinds, of which the deservedly famous *Pastoral Ballad*, which is really four separate poems, and the charming Spenserian imitation of *The Schoolmistress*, are certainly the best. Elsewhere in their author's work are things not much less pretty. It is in Shenstone, not in Sterne, that the sentimentalism of the eighteenth century finds its most genuine and unadulterated expression. And in his Essays we find much besides sentiment—some strangely advanced poetical criticism, much originality of thought, and some thoughts which are actually profound.

Shenstone.

A greater poet, less favoured by circumstance, was William Collins, who was born at Chichester in 1721. He was the son of a tradesman, but very respectably connected, and was educated at Winchester and Magdalen College, Oxford. But he left the University suddenly. Johnson, who knew and loved him, either did not know or would not reveal why. Probably Collins's mental disease had already appeared. At any rate, he went to London at the age

Collins.

[1] "And livelier far than Tyrian seemed his vest," probably suggested Campbell's still more luckless "Iberian seemed his boot."

of about twenty-four, published (1746-47) his tiny handful of *Odes* (he had already printed *Persian Eclogues*, 1742, and an *Epistle to Hanmer*, 1743), and was arrested for debt. But the booksellers, that maligned race, freed him on the security of a merely promised translation of the *Poetics*, and soon afterwards a legacy put him at ease. Unfortunately his mind gave way, and after some years of partial insanity he died in 1756. His poetical work consists of a few eclogues in couplets of next to no value, and of a rather larger batch of odes in different lyrical metres, together with two or three minor pieces, among which are the exquisite "Dirge in *Cymbeline*," and the beautiful if rather artificial piece on the death of Thomson. The odes, on the subjects of "Pity," "Fear," "Simplicity," "The Poetical Character," "Patriotism" (not so named, but universally known as "How Sleep the Brave"), "Mercy," "Liberty,' "The Death of Colonel Charles Ross," "Evening," "Peace," "The Manners," "The Passions," and "The Superstitions of the Highlands," are among the great texts of English poetry, if not among its greatest accomplishments. They are decidedly unequal, though hardly the worst is without something memorable. "How Sleep the Brave," "Liberty," "Evening" (in unrhymed verse), "Peace," the ever-famous "Passions," and parts of the "Highlands" ode (which never received Collins's final touches) are so beautiful, that a good deal of critical detachment is needed to appreciate them with absolute correctness. There is no danger of their being undervalued (as they have sometimes been overvalued) for a touch of that quite academic republican sentiment which was characteristic of the century. And their wonderful music—as in the whole of "How Sleep the Brave," in the opening stanzas of "Liberty" (the rest is far inferior), in the admirable landscape-painting and soft rhythmical undertone which for once redeem the foolish asceticism of refusing rhyme in "Evening," in the consummate variety of "The Passions," and in large passages of "The Superstitions"—can escape none but the deaf. But, at the same time, the curse of artificiality was still on Collins. Few have read, or at any rate remember, his worst verses; but even his best are never long without obvious faults. The "slow motion of his lines, clogged and impeded with clusters of consonants," which Johnson blames, often provides exactly that music which has been praised above. But it is impossible to traverse Johnson's other charge, that he puts his words out of the common order, and this charge may be extended to a more general one, that his diction, though not his versification, is starched and unnatural. His model seems to have been, if any one, Milton; and it is much easier to imitate Milton's pedantries than to borrow his genius. Yet it is by no means certain that Coleridge, born sixty years earlier, would

have been as great as Collins, while Collins, born sixty years later, might have been even greater than Coleridge.

Gray.

But by far the most important example of the clogs and crosses of the time is to be found in Thomas Gray,[1] a man of less original poetical inspiration than Collins, perhaps not much more gifted in this way even than Shenstone, but a far better and far wider scholar than either, and entirely free from all untoward circumstance. Neither Milton, nor Wordsworth, nor Tennyson had greater facility for developing whatsoever poetical gifts were in each than had Gray. His father, like Milton's, was a "money-scrivener," and the poet, born in London in 1716, was sent to Eton, where his mother's brother was a master. There he made friends with Horace Walpole, and thence he went to Cambridge (Peterhouse). He hated mathematics, but read widely; travelled for some time with Walpole to Italy, and after returning in 1741, was enabled by his father's death to give up the law (to which he had unwillingly taken) and settle himself at Cambridge. Although he was never a Fellow of either, he lived all his life in two colleges, Peterhouse and Pembroke, the change from one to the other being caused by an undergraduate practical joke. He would not take the Poet-Laureateship in 1757, but sought the Professorship of History at Cambridge in vain in 1762, and received it in 1768. He never lectured, and died at the end of July 1771, being not yet fifty-five. He had written most of his few poems in early manhood or middle life. The first published was the famous Eton Ode (1747), and the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" was then ready, though not printed till 1750. Besides his small handful of verse, we have from him some valuable Letters and Essays, and a good many chiefly classical *adversaria*. He planned a history of English poetry, and was probably the best-read man of letters of his time in Europe in regard to modern literature, not merely of his own country. And his later *Letters*, especially those from the Lakes in 1769, show, before those of most others, the rising sense of the Picturesque in literature.

Mr. Matthew Arnold has extolled, with a nearer approach to positive enthusiasm than was usual with him, the work of a poet whose temperament was not wholly unlike his own. It is easy to agree with Mr. Arnold that Gray's small original production was due to the times being out of joint with him; less easy to think that in others Gray would have done much more that was original. He would very likely have written his history of English poetry, and he would almost certainly have given us some, perhaps many, volumes of critical essays as acute, delicate, and well-informed as Mr. Arnold's

[1] *Works*, ed. Gosse, 4 vols. London, 1884.

own, and perhaps less alloyed with crotchets and limitations. But it is not probable that Gray would ever have been a much greater poet than he is. For though on one side the shortcomings of his time were uncongenial to him, though he could (through "a plano-convex mirror") see and love the country, and appreciate "the Gothick," and read Norse and Welsh and Old English, he was still in verse a slave, and a willing slave, to a certain classical and literary convention. His poems are careful mosaics of previous literary expression; he delighted in that feeble personification which is really worse, not better, than the older imagery of the *Rose;* his diction, though Wordsworth's attack on it is not quite fair, has a dangerous admixture of the cut-and-dried. The "rosy-bosomed Hours," and the "toiling hand of Care," and "Contemplation's sober eye," jostle tags from Virgil and Milton and Shakespeare. Apostrophes meet us everywhere. When we read the "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat," we say (at least some of us, for from Johnson to the present day there have been dissentients)—"That could not have been better done—that is done with the grain, in keeping, at ease." When we turn to the Eton Ode, fine as it is, there is a sense of buckram in the form, of rouge in the colouring. The truth and sincerity of the sentiment, the brilliancy and finish of the diction, only make us feel more distinctly what is *not* there.

These characteristics are almost sufficiently shown in the famous *Elegy*, where, beside the fact that Gray adjusts his difficulties and harmonises his endeavours better than anywhere else, appears the other fact that he is, after all, but a second-rate poet. That the sentiment is commonplace is not against it, but the contrary; the poet is to deal with the commonplace and to make it not common. That the phrasing is exquisite cannot be denied; the soft perfection of conventionality, just touched and tinged with the dawn of something higher and greater, cannot but appeal to every generous taste. Though the quatrain, unless the poet resorts to such devices of *enjambement* and linked rhyme as Mr. Swinburne's in *Laus Veneris*, is dangerously subject either to monotony or to an abrupt and jerky movement, Gray has vanquished these tendencies. But the expression never quite reaches that poignant suggestiveness, that endless circling of new and ever new music, which distinguishes the greatest poetry. The suggestion is not that which Mr. Arnold has so charitably taken as the key to Gray, that the poet is not "speaking out," that there are, behind, treasures of poetry which he keeps in reserve; but that there is nothing more to come, that there ought to be something, and that he is even dimly conscious of both facts. It may be that there is no very wide or real demand (though at times it is the fashion to affect it) for this "over-soul" in poetry; and the

popularity, immediate, immense, and, it is to be hoped, never likely to cease, of the *Elegy*, is no discouraging evidence that there is a demand for true poetry of a kind a little lower. But that there is this shortcoming in Gray, in the *Odes* as well as in the *Elegy*, in the few other pieces as well as in the *Odes*, and that though partly it was not wholly or even mainly the fault of his time, there can be little doubt. His scholarliness has justly propitiated scholars; his nature, such as it is, has justly charmed the general; in "Spring," in "The Progress of Poesy," in "Vicissitude," even in the stagey and mannered "Bard," there are the fine things, the inevitable, the always surprising and new. But they are not very common, and they are constantly jumbled up with the tawdry, the artificial, and the stale.

We must now hasten the tale. John Byrom, sprung of a good Manchester family, was born in 1692, went to St. Paul's School and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became a Fellow, and celebrated the charms of "Jug," or Joanna, Bentley (a daughter of the awful Aristarch, who seems to have charmed all his college), in some pretty verses, beginning—

My time, O ye muses, was happily spent,

which appeared in the *Spectator*. Byrom was later a physician, an industrious and successful teacher of the first really good system of shorthand, a strong Jacobite, and a mystic in religion. His works[1] consist of a voluminous and often interesting diary, and a large bulk of very various verse, the best known and perhaps the best piece of which is the famous Jacobite epigram, "God Bless the King, of Church and State defender." His practice of throwing every possible subject into verse, very often of the swinging trisyllabic kind, of which he was a great lover and a very clever practitioner, has not improved the poetical merit of his work; but he had much more diffuse poetry in him than all but one or two of his contemporaries, and his voluminous work, which has had the good fortune to secure two admirable editors, is singularly interesting to read, and furnishes side-lights on the time only inferior to those of the greatest memoir-writers.

Byrom, Savage, and others.

No greater contrast to Byrom can be even imagined than Richard Savage (1697-1743), a profligate charlatan, who, partly by the accident of being a personal friend of Johnson, and partly by the

[1] Published by the Chetham Society at Manchester in two divisions. *Remains*, by R. Parkinson (4 parts or 2 vols. 1854, *sq.*), and *Poems*, by A. W. Ward (4 parts or 2 vols. 1894, *sq.*).

claims he made to being a persecuted "love-child" of persons of quality, obtained, and to some extent kept, a reputation quite disproportionate to his worth. His chief poem, *The Wanderer* (1729), is a rhetorical piece in five cantos, very difficult to follow, in which the idea of travel very thinly supports long "screeds" of moral declamation. Its metre is an attempt at the couplet, rather as Dryden left it than as Pope transformed; its diction is admittedly Thomsonian. *The Bastard*, a year older, more forcible, and more like Dryden, puts, with at any rate literary skill, Savage's claim to be Lady Macclesfield's son; and the verses on Lady Tyrconnel's recovery are also in a fairly imitative swing of Drydenian flattery. Savage rarely attempted lyric, and few of his minor verses of any kind go beyond the merits of the exercise.

David Malloch, who, for reasons rather variously stated, changed his name to Mallet, was born about 1702, and, when not much past twenty, produced in "William and Margaret" a *pastiche*-imitation of the ballad style revealed by Watson's and Ramsay's publications (*vide infra*), which had great influence. Mallet has disputed with Thomson the credit of "Rule Britannia," a poem of vigorous declamation and genuine patriotic sentiment, which, however, owes more to the merit of its music than to that of its poetry. His longer poems, *The Excursion* and *Amyntor and Theodora*, are quite open imitations of his friend, as his *Verbal Criticism* is of Pope. "Edwin and Emma," though not so good, was long as famous as "William and Margaret," and all but a few of Mallet's more numerous pieces in the lighter style show the grace and wit which belongs to the now too much neglected lighter verse of the eighteenth century. Mallet, who was more of a general man of letters than a poet, died in 1765. In his relations with Sarah Marlborough, Bolingbroke, and others he showed no very high standard of literary morality and dignity; but it is rather absurd to blame him for writing against Byng, whose execution some very good judges have held to be not unjust, and distinctly beneficial.

Conjoined with Mallet in the never-executed task of writing a life of Marlborough, like him a Thomsonian in style, and like him a politician, though a more independent one, was Richard Glover, born in 1712, who was all his life connected with business as well as with letters, and though for a time unfortunate in his city affairs, died prosperous in 1785. The contrast between the vigour of Glover's political ballad, "Admiral Hozier's Ghost" and the wastes of his stupendous and terrible blank-verse epics, *Leonidas* and *The Athenaid*, containing between them some 20,000 lines, presents in little the contrast of the whole poetry of the time.

Two of the most interesting verse-writers of the middle of the

century, both illustrating the peculiarities of the time, were Armstrong and Akenside, the first a decided Thomsonian in at least the accidents of verse, the other a nondescript, but resembling other nondescripts of other times strangely.

John Armstrong, the less important, was born in Roxburghshire in 1709, and educated at Edinburgh, but very shortly went to London, where he practised medicine till his death in 1779. Some of his early verse is whimsical and a little more, but in 1744 he published *The Art of Preserving Health*, which did not clash with the ideas of the age in poetry, and was quite within them as to personal conduct. He was the friend of Wilkes, and also of Smollett, whom he resembled in a perfervid temper and in occasional coarseness of literary expression. No one now would write on Armstrong's subjects in Armstrong's manner, but his grasp of the peculiar Thomsonian diction and versification was extraordinary.

Mark Akenside was the son of a butcher at Newcastle, where he was born in 1721. He was at first intended for the dissenting ministry, but his studies at Edinburgh and Leyden drew him to physic. His *Pleasures of Imagination* appeared in the same year with Armstrong's *Art of Preserving Health.* Akenside. Akenside was a very strong Whig of the Republican variety, and his principles inspired the brilliant "Epistle to Curio" (Pulteney) which, in accordance with an awkward habit of his, he afterwards rehandled and spoilt. He practised first at Northampton, then in London, having fortified himself with a Cambridge degree; he attained considerable repute in his own profession, though his oddities caused him to be pilloried by Smollett as the physician who gave the "Roman dinner" at Paris; and even Johnson, who hated his principles, admits that he might have risen very high if he had not died in middle life (apparently of typhoid) in 1770.

Akenside is a very fair touchstone of criticism. It is impossible to like or even to admire him very heartily; he belongs to a class of poets, represented in most days, who are plaster rather than marble, photograph rather than picture, pinchbeck rather than gold or even copper. And yet a reluctant confession must accompany all reasonable depreciation of him. It is a question whether Akenside wants much to have turned his statue into life, or at least his stucco into alabaster. *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, often and perhaps excusably called tepid, constantly quiver or go near to quivering with the needed glow; the "Hymn to the Naiads" has a strange frozen grace; the *Odes*, at their best, fall not so far short of Collins, and not at all short of all but the best of Gray; and the "Epistle to Curio" is a most remarkable study. It has the sincerity, the throb, that

Pope's satire, except when tinged with personal hate, wants; it has the hurry, the rise, the intense discipline, of the best satiric verse, and it only lacks the disengagement, the supremacy, of Dryden. It is a pity that Lord Macaulay, in a passage which has probably been read by a thousand to one who knows the poem, should have sneered at it. For, in truth, almost its only fault is an unpractical devotion to principle. It may not be party war; but it is not so very far from being magnificent ethically, and it is poetically fine.

Resurrection of the Ballad: Percy and others.

That most interesting and important thing, the Resurrection of the Ballad, and indeed of old poetry generally, was going on during the whole, or nearly the whole, of the first half of the century; and the effects of it are visible in some of the poets, notably Mallet and Shenstone, who have been noticed already. But though there may be, as Dryden says, "in epochès mistakes," if we endeavour to point them too closely, the appearance of Percy's *Reliques*[1] in 1765 is not likely soon to be dethroned from its place of vantage, and we may most conveniently here make a halt, a digression, or a parenthesis, in order to mention it and its preliminaries. The first of these saw the light (as was perhaps natural, seeing that old Scots poetry had died sooner than English) in Scotland earlier than in England. At the very time of the Union, in 1706, 1708, and 1711, James Watson, the King's printer, printed in Craig's Close, opposite the Cross of Edinburgh, his *Choice Collection*,[2] opening with *Christ's Kirk on the Green*, and containing pieces of Montgomery, Drummond, Ayton, and Sempill, with others of various ages and merits. There is no doubt that Watson's venture gave the hint to Allan Ramsay, whose *Evergreen* and *Tea-Table Miscellany*,[3] on similar principles, but with more individual editing and addition, appeared later (1724-40). It is not probable that Watson had much direct effect on England, but the "Scotch tunes," which had even affected Dryden, have no small influence on two most interesting collections which appeared in London before Ramsay's own gatherings, Tom D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy*[4] (1719) and an anonymous assembly (1723) of *Old Ballads*[5] "printed from the best and oldest copies." The former was still intended as an actual "Warbler" for use; the latter is professedly a literary collection, perhaps to be put to the credit of "Namby Pamby" Phillips.

[1] Editions very numerous; that of H. B. Wheatley, 3 vols. London, 1886, is the best. Thomas Percy (1729-1811), who died Bishop of Dromore, a friend of Johnson and all the later eighteenth-century wits, and an excellent person, did much other literary work, original, editorial, and translating. He adulterated his ballads, but he knew no better.

[2] Reprinted, Glasgow, 1869.

[3] Reprinted, 4 vols. Glasgow, 1876.

[4] Reprinted, 6 vols. London, *n.d.*

[5] Reprinted, 3 vols. London, *n.d.*

D'Urfey,[1] who was old enough to have been among the later and lower rivals of Dryden, seems to have had much of the careless ringing song-faculty of the elder age. The compiler of the *Old Ballads* is chiefly interesting because of his idea, and because of the way in which (as the whole eighteenth century did till near its close) he mixes modern *pastiches* and risky trifles with his old matter. In 1737 appeared the first volume (there was no second) of *The Muses' Library*, giving itself out as the work of Mrs. E. Cooper, but attributed to the antiquary Oldys. It is not quite what it calls itself, "A general Collection of almost all the old valuable poetry extant"—it could hardly be that in four hundred small pages of large type. But it contains no despicable anthology from Langland to Daniel. In 1760 came the remarkable *Prolusions* of Edward Capell, containing, as formerly noticed, not merely the *Nut-browne Maid*, but *Edward III.* and Davies's *Nosce Teipsum;* and this was but five years before the *Reliques* themselves, which, planned by Percy and Shenstone, assisted by Lord Hailes and others, based upon the Folio MS., and supplemented from various sources new and old, give to this day one of the most delightful collections of "old valuable poetry" extant, and taught the next two generations to write valuable new poetry. Nor in atmosphere, subject, and, for good as well as for bad, style, need we fear to yoke with it Macpherson's *Ossian* (1760-63), discarding altogether the question whether it was faithful translation, ingenious adaptation of fragments, or mere and sheer forgery. It gave, just as the ballads gave, something *different*—the necessary twist and alterative to the actual course of poetry—and that is enough.[2]

But we must now take up the direct history. The poetry of Johnson is so intimately connected with his other work that it, like Goldsmith's, can hardly be noticed separately, but it is of the first importance to note that both represent a reaction from the reaction —a "neo-classic" halt, if not return. The grotesque odes and the pleasing hymns of Watts (1674-1748), the far greater hymns of Charles Wesley (1708-88), the safely recorded, if seldom consulted,

[1] He was born about 1650, and died 1723. His production was immense, and has never been collected. In 1721 he published four hundred pages, closely printed, of verse under the title *New Operas*, with *Comical Stories and Poems on Several Occasions*. Here, in the quatrain poem of "Socrates and Timandra," is perhaps the most prosaic line in the English language—

Uncommon and *particularly rare.*

But Tom had merits.

[2] It is almost impossible to deal with *Ossian* briefly and satisfactorily. Thorough students should read the book itself, Blair's Dissertation, Macgregor's *Genuine Remains of Ossian* (London, 1841), and the more recent work of Bailey Saunders (*Life of Macpherson*, London, 1894), Nutt (on Ossian and Fingal in Old Irish), and J. T. Smart (valuable and judicial).

verses of the minor contributors to Dodsley's *Miscellany*,[1] and others can but be referred to in passing; but Langhorne and Mickle, men not even admitted to the asylum of Mr. Ward's poets, are too characteristic of the time not to demand a little more notice; and Smart, Mason, Falconer, Warton, Churchill, Beattie, and Chatterton must have individual mention.

Dodsley's *Miscellany*.

It may be permitted to think that Christopher Smart has been of late almost as much overrated as for generations he was ignored. The author, whose admitted want of sanity excuses a good deal of folly and some moral delinquency, was born in Kent in 1722, and had every chance, his education at Durham and Cambridge settling him in a Fellowship at Pembroke College. Johnson defended him half jocularly, but the piece of Smart's work which was least likely to appeal to Johnson is that which has secured him his vogue of late years. This is the now famous *Song to David*,[2] to which the praise given to it in Mr. Ward's *Poets*, and Mr. Browning's allotment to the author of a place in the *Parleying with certain People of Importance*, have given a notoriety certainly not attained by the rest of Smart's work, familiar as, for a century or so, it ought to have been by its inclusion in Chalmers, where the *Song* is not. Smart, as there presented, is very much like other people of his time, giving some decent hackwork, a good deal of intentionally serious matter of no value, and a few light pieces of distinct merit.

Smart.

The *Song to David* is quite different from all these. It consists of some hundred six-line "Romance" stanzas, and was written in a lucid or half-lucid interval of its author's madness. The language and imagery are largely supplied direct from the Bible. In such a case a man can hardly go wrong, unless he lacks scholarship, ear, and familiarity with other standards, and Smart lacked none of these. The translator of Horace, the fashioner of easy epigrams and Prior-like frivolities, was not likely to drop into those distressing absurdities which annoy and half-surprise us in Watts, the Wesleys, and even Cowper. At the same time, his madness set him free from the mere convention of the eighteenth century, and the result is delightful at times, interesting always. But those who say that "there is nothing like it in the eighteenth century" must have temporarily forgotten Charles Wesley before, and still more Blake afterwards. It is a hurrying rhapsody of confused images, wonderful beside some contemporary work, not so wonderful beside the sources of its own

[1] This (6 vols.), with the continuation of Pearch (4 vols.), fills 10 vols. (the edition I use is that of 1775). Those who wish really to appreciate the verse of the century cannot do better than read it through.

[2] Ed. Tutin, Cottingham, near Hull, 1904.

inspiration. Read it after *The Art of Preserving Health*, and it is nearly miraculous; read it after "Arise, shine, for thy light is come," and poetry must for once acknowledge an utter inferiority to translated prose.

William Mason, now chiefly thought of in his connection with Gray, lived from 1725 to 1797, was a Cambridge man (it was at Pembroke that he made Gray's acquaintance), and became precentor of York. He wrote *The English Garden*, a blank-verse poem published between 1772 and 1782, two tragedies, *Elfrida* (1753) and *Caractacus* (1759), divers *Odes*, and not a few smaller poems, of which the fustian epitaph on his wife ("dead Maria") in Bristol Cathedral is best known, and is somewhat redeemed by the final quatrain, the work of Gray. All the less good points of that poet--his stiffness, his artificial poetic diction, and so forth--are exaggerated by Mason; but he has hardly a touch of Gray's poetry, and not many touches of his scholarship. Mason.

William Falconer was an interesting person, and a not quite uninteresting poet. He was born in Edinburgh in 1732, the son of a barber, went to sea, and is said to have been, about the middle of the century, shipwrecked near Cape Colonna, thus acquiring the experience for the poem that gave him fame. Very little seems to be really known about his history, but his dedication of *The Shipwreck* to the Duke of York, in 1762, brought him a commission in the Navy. He married, did some miscellaneous literary work, including a Marine Dictionary, which is traditionally well spoken of, and in 1769 was purser of the *Aurora* frigate, which was lost after leaving the Cape, somewhere in the Indian Ocean. *The Shipwreck* is one of those numerous eighteenth-century poems which, no doubt unconsciously, endeavour to escape the tyranny of the couplet-form by taking an unconventional subject, as well as by throwing in classical and other allusions. Falconer.

The brothers Warton, and especially Thomas, the Laureate, exhibit, on the contrary, some of the weaknesses, yet very many of the gifts and graces of their time. They were sons of a former Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, who was Professor of Poetry and Vicar of Basingstoke. Here they were born, Thomas, the more poetical of them, in the year 1728. Joseph, the future headmaster of Winchester, the editor of Pope, a very good critic, under the limitations of his time, and a pleasing versifier, had seen the light six years earlier. Thomas went to Trinity College, Oxford, before he was sixteen, and practically spent the rest of his life there, dying in 1790. He also was Professor of Poetry from 1757-67, and Poet-Laureate from 1785 till his death. His The Wartons.

really great *History of English Poetry*,[1] which few men have been competent to discuss, and of which no one competent (unless cankered to the core like Ritson) has ever spoken without respect, began to appear in 1774. It was exactly what was wanted by the age, and its defects are far more than compensated by its merits; while in his *Observations on Spenser* and other things Warton carried further his task of upsetting the notion of the first half of the century, that before Dryden English poetry had numbered, at best, some intelligent barbarians. His own poetry, though not great, has been distinctly undervalued. *The Triumph of Isis* is one of the very best pieces of the school of Pope; *The Progress of Discontent*, the very best echo in a milder spirit, but with little loss of truth and vigour, of the "Omnia Vanitas" of Swift. But he was a rather indolent person in a rather indolent age.

Churchill.

Indolence, in the case of Charles Churchill, was dispersed by malignity. This too much forgotten satirist, who made a distinct and valuable reaction in the form of the couplet, was the son of the rector of Rainham, but born in 1731 in Westminster, where his father had preferment. He went to Westminster School very early, but enjoyed the benefit of neither University, being, it is said, rejected for matriculation at Oxford, and though admitted at Trinity, Cambridge, keeping no terms there. He obtained orders in 1756; but, as his biographer says, he soon "relaxed from the obligations of virtue," and became a self-unfrocked priest. He died at the age of thirty-three at Boulogne, and the story that his last words were, "What a fool I have been," is certainly not invalidated by the denial of his estimable friend John Wilkes. His work, almost all done hastily during the last years of his life, in the intervals of debauchery and in the spirit of bravado, adhering for the most part to a conventional form of satire, and animated by a personal spite, which is even more worthy of contempt than of condemnation, has many grave defects. But the trifling subject and the venomous personalities of *The Rosciad* cannot hide its vigour, the occasional acuteness of its criticisms, and above all the return, in the management of the couplet, from the exquisite but rather shrilling treble of Pope to the manly range of Dryden. And the same qualities, with sometimes less, sometimes more of the same defects, appear in *The Apology*, *Night*, the fierce anti-North-Briton *Prophecy of Famine*, the spiteful but not always unjust *Epistle to Hogarth*, and indeed all the couplet poems; while *The* [*Cock Lane*] *Ghost*, a Hudibrastic poem in four books, though perhaps too much

[1] The edition formerly (p. 39) noted, though the best for instruction, does not do the original author justice, as its perpetual additions and corrections, in the text itself, make it impossible to appreciate his work.

spun out, contains a vast deal of acute, if ill-natured wit. The passage here on "Pomposo" (Johnson) is only the best known, not by any means the only good, example of that style of acrid censorship where the whole is unfair, while by no means all the parts are unjust. Churchill's styles and subjects belonged to the outskirts of the poetic domain, and he had little nobility of thought. But to speak of him as some have spoken is to miss that touch of justice with which he himself generally managed to wing his lampoons.

The two poets to be mentioned next present that contrast which we have so often found attractive, both showing the influence of their time in the most diverse circumstances, and on the most diverse temperaments and fates. Thomas Chatterton[1] was born at Bristol in November 1752, the son of a schoolmaster and cathedral singer, who died before the poet was born. The boy was much about the great church of St. Mary Redcliffe, took to black letter, received some education, was bound to an attorney, and in 1764 produced the first of the famous "Rowley" poems in would-be Old English. For nearly six years he endured his life, increasing his production as local ignorance and vanity, or his own mood, tempted him; and towards the close of this period he was first lured by hopes of patronage from Horace Walpole, and then had his hopes dashed. He left for London in the spring of 1770, and made some money by literary hackwork of different kinds. But, the demand temporarily failing, with no resources, and too proud to beg, he poisoned himself in his Holborn lodgings on 24th August, being not yet eighteen. Chatterton.

James Beattie was born in Kincardineshire seventeen years before Chatterton, and was educated at the Marischal College of Aberdeen, where, after some schoolmastering, he became Professor of Moral Philosophy in 1760. He wrote verse, and in 1770 attacked Hume in an *Essay on Truth*, which gained him vast applause, offers of preferment in the Church of England, and an allegorical glorification in one of Reynolds's few bad pictures. In 1771-74 he published *The Minstrel*, and later several volumes of criticism and discussion, religious and æsthetic. He died in 1802, universally and very deservedly respected, for he was a good man and a good writer, though not exactly a poet. Beattie.

The Rowley poems and Beattie's *Minstrel* are almost as different as the careers and characters of their authors, but they express exactly the same influence, the almost desperate determination to

[1] Professor Skeat's otherwise valuable "Aldine" edition unfortunately presents a modernised version of the "Rowley" Poems: the older ones are therefore to be preferred.

escape from the conventional present by appealing to the romantic past. After a very brief period of controversy as to the genuineness of Rowley (which even at the time such mere pioneers and dilettanti in the study of Old English as Gray and Mason at once negatived), this has been entirely given up, and the patient exertions of Professor Skeat have shown the originals, the processes, and the entire machinery in the invention of the dialect. But it may be permitted to protest against the printing of the poems as a whole in modernised form, and still more against the extraordinary liberties which others have taken with Chatterton's text, even to the Bentleian extent of substituting words which to the individual critic "seem more appropriate." It is certain that if we wish to appreciate Chatterton's actual poetic powers, we must take the words he wrote in the spelling in which he wrote them; though linguistic inquiry may take its own course. Thus considering, we shall find him a distinct puzzle, showing in his ordinary English nothing of the charm which floats about his Rowleian dialect-pieces, and even in these not perhaps suggesting the certain possession of that charm had he lived. His metrical ability is great, even if it be rather too much to claim for him that he fully anticipated Coleridge's reversion to the *Genesis and Exodus* scheme, and his phrase and word-music have now and then a singular romantic appeal. But there is something disquieting in this, since it exactly resembles the not infrequent, but always passing gifts of very young children; and it makes him æsthetically a delight, but critically a problem. His antiques vary from *pastiches*, hardly more really antique than Thomson or Shenstone, though inspired by the study of somewhat older models, to things almost or wholly exquisite, like "Ælla's Dirge." The nature-touches are in the same way sometimes exquisite, sometimes conventional, and the whole is a strange medley of promise, performance, and failure.

There is, on the other hand, no puzzle about Beattie. He represents, with a quite marvellous and rather terrible sufficiency, the rather more than averagely gifted, and much more than averagely cultivated, man, who, coming to years of literary discretion at a critical time, feels its (in this case, Romantic) impulse with all his will, and carries it out to the best of his might. Unfortunately, that might was very small; Beattie's early verses are simply echoes of Collins and Gray, his translations are unimportant, and his couplet-protest against the erection of a monument to Churchill fails to make up in vigour for what it wants in generosity. Nay, *The Minstrel* or *The Progress of Genius* can satisfy only the most moderate expectations, or the least fastidious taste. There is absolutely no story; the expression is seldom or never striking, and the versification (it is Spenserian), though not contemptible, has no distinction. But all

the objects of the early, confused, Romantic appetite—country scenes, woods, ruins, the moon, chivalry, mountains—are dwelt upon with a generous emotion, and with at least poetic intention. Above all, Beattie was important "for *them*," to apply once more one of the most constantly applicable of critical dicta. His time could understand him, as it could not have understood purer Romanticism, and it is probable that, for an entire generation at least, and perhaps longer, *The Minstrel* served to bring sometimes near, and sometimes quite, to poetry, readers who would have found Coleridge too fragmentary, Shelley too ethereal, and both too remote.

Yet another pair may be noticed briefly before turning to the great quartette of Burns, Blake, Cowper, and Crabbe, which appeared before the death of Johnson, and the last feeble growth which preluded the *réveil* of the Lyrical Ballads. These specimens of a great host shall be Langhorne and Mickle. Langhorne and Mickle.

John Langhorne was born at Kirkby Stephen in 1735, and educated at Appleby. He never went to either University, though he was entered at Clare Hall, Cambridge, and his time passed chiefly in tutorships and schoolmasterships. He married twice; did a good deal of literary work, which included the well-known translation of Plutarch (with his brother William): had fair clerical preferment, and died in 1779. William Julius Mickle was born at Langholm on the Scottish side of the Border in 1734, was educated at Edinburgh, was unfortunate in business, went to London at the age of thirty to engage in literature, and died there in 1788, after also doing varied work, the best known and most successful being his translation of *The Lusiad*, which, like Langhorne's Plutarch, does not greatly concern us.

But these men are excellent specimens of not excellent poets. Mickle's[1] songs and ballads, such as "There's nae luck about the house," in Scots, and the pretty "Cumnor Hall" in English; Langhorne's topographical work, such as "Studley Park," and his remarkable anticipation of Crabbe in "The Country Justice," are something more than straws. They are unmistakable vanes, showing in what directions the poetical wind was blowing. And Langhorne at least sometimes has a melancholy clangour of verse too rare in his century.

[1] Mickle had very much to do with the first edition of Evans's *Old Ballads* (2 vols. 1777, and 2 more, 1784), a designed supplement to Percy, and, like the *Reliques*, consisting of an odd mixture of genuine old stuff, the same altered, modern *pastiches*, ballad and Ossianic, etc. The second edition of this, in 1810 (4 vols.), is a historical document of a striking kind, the editor and publisher, Evans's son, showing the further drift of the time by ruthlessly turning out most of the *pastiches*, correcting the old work from originals, and adding more.

Cowper.

Of the greater four, William Cowper[1] was by far the eldest, indeed the unfortunate circumstances of his life threw his composition almost a generation behindhand. He was born in 1731 at Great Berkhamstead, where his father was rector. The family had already attained great legal distinction, and the poet's mother was a Miss Donne, of the house of the great Dean of St. Paul's. Cowper was educated at Westminster, where, notwithstanding the black account of public schools given later in *Tirocinium*, he made many friends, as he also did in his subsequent study of both branches of the law. He wrote for the fashionable periodical of the *Connoisseur*, and seemed likely to be happy and (for his family interest was great) prosperous. But the seeds of madness in him were developed by the crossing of his love for his cousin Theodora, by the nervous excitement of his appointment to certain clerkships in the House of Lords, and by religious stimulus. The form which his mania took (1763) was suicidal, and though, after proper treatment, he recovered, his prospects were irrecoverably blighted. Removing into the country with a small allowance, he lived first at Huntingdon, and then at Olney, in friendship with the famous Evangelical clergyman John Newton, and with the family of the Unwins. After about fifteen years (during which he had at least one return of mania, or at best melancholy) he began to write, first hymns with Newton, and then miscellaneous poetry. For rather more than ten years he was happy, sane, and (for a part of them) a good deal in love with a widow, named Lady Austin. His first poems, *Truth*, *Error*, etc., appeared in 1782, *The Task* in 1785, his *Homer* a little later. He should have died now; but, unluckily for him, he survived for yet another decade of misery, through mental and bodily illness, dying at East Dereham in 1800, in the frame of mind expressed by his last and perhaps his greatest poem, the wonderful *Castaway*, where the poetry of utter despair is expressed, albeit with the utmost simplicity, yet in a fashion which makes mere Byronism of Leopardi and the second James Thomson.

Cowper's ten or twelve years' work, even excluding his translation of Homer and other things, is by no means inconsiderable, and its range is almost as remarkable as its bulk. His letters are among the very best in English, perfectly unaffected and natural, and yet as accomplished literature as if they had been written for publication. His verse, in all but its very best things, requires more allowance and historical adjustment. The famous *John Gilpin* among the lighter things, like *The Castaway* and *Boadicea* among the more serious, need neither; they stand by themselves, and will always obtain admission

[1] The standard edition of Cowper's whole *Works* is Southey's; Mr. Benham's "Globe" edition of the *Poems* is excellent.

for their author into the courts of the greater poetry, wherever the critical doorkeepers are not hopelessly incompetent and prejudiced. But elsewhere Cowper exhibits not merely some defects due to his hapless fate, but more due to his time. He was a student of nature, a practitioner of easy and conventional forms of verse, and a writer of the simplest and most graceful English. But he was born when Pope had not yet written some of his most characteristic work, the sane years of his early manhood were passed while Johnson was obtaining his dictatorship, and when he began to write in earnest that dictatorship was in full force. Accordingly, we find in him the oddest mixture of old and new—couplet-writing, not indeed of the strictest Popian school (for he had improved on Churchill, and gone back to *enjambement*), but still cramped and artificial ; blank verse, not quite copied from any one, but too often stiff and deformed by the poetic diction which, violently as he attacked it, survives even in Wordsworth. Yet we find, side by side with these, and sometimes actually couched in them, the most faithful and exquisite studies of nature—culminating at least once in the full reflex meditation, the sense of man's identity with nature, that appears in *Yardley Oak* (1791)—a gentle humour totally free from the hardness and from the license which too frequently deface the otherwise excellent fun of the eighteenth century, and, though few touches of passion, yet some, such as the famous—

I was a stricken deer that left the herd—

thrilling with the same intensity which afterwards gathered force and gloom in the final crash of *The Castaway*.

Such a poet is sure to occupy a peculiar position both in his lifetime and subsequently. In the last ten or twenty years of the eighteenth, and the first ten or twenty of the nineteenth, Cowper, of no great power with the critics, was an immense influence with readers. He had just as much Romanticism as they were fit for, and though it is an absurdity to represent him as in any way revolutionary, his work contained the seeds, and showed the symptoms, of impending revolution. He is the direct intermediary between Thomson and Wordsworth, and the contrast between him and Goldsmith (see next chapter), who was almost within a year or two his contemporary, exhibits the whole difference between the dominant but waning, and the insurgent but soon to be triumphant, poetical instincts of the time. Regarded from a more formal point of view, Cowper's poetry inclines rather to the old than to the new. He is a very easy, as he was a very careful, writer, but the many-centred and varying measures and melodies of the coming age were not for him. He had not, as his twenty years' junior Chatterton had, come to any

knowledge of the *Christabel* metre; his trisyllables by themselves, as in the well-known "The rose it was washed," show no advance upon Shenstone's in resonance and fluidity; the noble trochees of *Boadicea*, and the still nobler iambs of *The Castaway*, have the simple movement of his own time, not, like Blake's, the complicated throb of later measures. Intellectually, Cowper is rendered more difficult in appearance, perhaps, than in reality by his malady. He would probably not have been very different as a perfectly sane man; that is to say, he would have at least shown generous sympathies, pure morality, and, above all things, the instincts and conduct of a gentleman, in the very best sense of the word, without joining to them any very vigorous reasoning power or wide faculty of appreciation. His nature, slightly feminine, must always have been more than slightly prejudiced; but his prejudices sometimes contribute to his poetry, and rarely interfere with it.

Crabbe, the nearest to Cowper of the other three in form, and on some sides (not all), of taste, was many years his junior, being born in 1754, and did not die till more than as many after him in 1832.

Crabbe.

But accident of a less ghastly kind interposed nearly the same odd gap in his literary production. He was born at the Suffolk Aldborough, now often spelt Aldeburgh, in 1754, his father having been first a schoolmaster, then an exciseman; was educated as a surgeon, and practised a little, but went to London to seek his fortune in literature, and obtained, when at the last extremity, the patronage of Burke and Thurlow. His first poem, *The Library*, appeared in 1782, his second, *The Village*, was revised by Johnson. He took orders, received preferment, and married a girl of station superior to his own, to whom he had long been attached. *The Newspaper* appeared in 1785. For twenty years he published nothing. But he began again in 1807 with *The Parish Register*, followed it in 1810 with his greatest book, *The Borough*, and later gave *Tales in Verse* and *Tales of the Hall*. During his last years Crabbe was treated with much honour and no jealousy by the younger and greater poets of the Romantic school, always had a considerable public, and enjoyed his reputation to the full—the early moodiness and restiveness which were probably due, in part at least, to the trials of his youth, softening to an easy *bonhomie*, which sometimes approached the childish, in his age.

However, temperament, or suffering, or what not, impressed upon most of his work,[1] and upon all the best parts of it, a character not at all childish. Crabbe tried several poetic ways; some of his early works, such as *The Library* and *The Newspaper*, being little more

[1] *Works*, first (1840-41) in 8 vols. with his son's *Life*, then in 1 (London, *n.d.*), considerably increased in Dr. Ward's "Cambridge Classics" ed. (3 vols.)

than a continuation of the verse-description of Garth and Armstrong and Falconer. But he settled, in *The Village*, and in all his later works, into a very peculiar kind of "criticism of life," anticipated, as has been said, very slightly by Langhorne, but in the main original. Crabbe could see nature, and describes it—especially those aspects which may be symbolically classed as autumnal, the aspects suggesting failure, decay, disappointment—with astonishing truth; but he was still of his century in the fact that he preferred characters to scenes, and chiefly set the latter as frames to the former. And here, too, grimness prevails. Not only in the famous story of the tyrant, Peter Grimes, but in such milder tragedies as "The Natural Death of Love," and the enforced constancy of the repenting lover in "Delay has Danger," Crabbe always seems to incline to the sterner side, to a quiet and undemonstrative pessimism. In style and form he is a curious mixture. He early struck into, and always kept, a fashion of couplet-writing, which was sometimes almost intolerably pedestrian; but he could diversify it, when he rose to the class of gloomy subject just referred to, with lines, and indeed long passages, of astonishing vigour. On the whole, Crabbe is the least poetical of all the writers who can be called in any way as good poets as himself, and he is seldom poetical at all except when he is a pessimist. The browner shadows seem to inspire him as sunshine does others. But he was invaluable to his generation, and can never lose value to others, first as a painter of nature, and then as one of manners and character. In externals he innovated hardly at all; in essentials he is as far from Goldsmith or from Pope as Wordsworth himself.

The third Englishman of the trio stands far apart both from Cowper and Crabbe. William Blake[1] is one of the eccentrics of poetry; it was never his chief business, which was that of a painter, or his chief hobby, which was that of a seer. He produced (or in the first case had produced for him, for he seems to have taken very little trouble about it) three very small volumes of verse—the *Poetical Sketches* of 1783, the *Songs of Innocence* in 1789, and the *Songs of Experience* in 1794, the two last being not in any sense published, and hardly in any sense printed at all, being worked, text and designs alike, from copper plates, and coloured by hand. To these indeed may be added, if the extension of the term poetry be tolerated, a great mass of so-called "prophetic" work, rhapsodies bearing much resemblance to *Ossian* in style, and containing the exposition of a visionary theosophy. Blake was a Londoner for the whole of his life, with the rarest and briefest

Blake.

[1] *Complete Works*, ed. Ellis and Yeats, 3 vols. London, 1893. The *Poems* have at last been edited with strict fidelity to MS. by Mr. John Sampson (Oxford, 1905). Gilchrist's *Life*, 2nd ed. 2 vols. London, 1880, is almost indispensable.

intervals; he was born in 1757, and died in 1827. He married early a jewel of a wife, Catherine Boucher, and he supported himself partly by engraving, partly by selling his original compositions to a few private customers. His character, though morally stainless, was extremely odd; and it would be extremely difficult to frame any definition of complete sanity which would take him in. The greater part of his prophetic work is a mere curiosity, and his critical opinions in art and literature, if sometimes almost inspired, are one-sided and prejudiced to a degree sometimes almost ludicrous. Nor is his touch in poetry any surer than his hand in painting. But in both vocations, and perhaps especially in that of the poet, he gives flashes, and sometimes more than flashes, of genius, which excel anything to be found in the work of his time. There are at least half a dozen things in the *Poetical Sketches* which no contemporary, who had advanced beyond the nursery or at best the schoolroom, could have written; while, both here and in the later *Songs*, there are pieces which, for a certain combination of extreme simplicity with unearthly music, no contemporary nor any follower, except Thomas Beddoes, was to equal. In all points of art, both pictorial and poetic, Blake was an extreme, indeed an extravagant, Romantic—that is to say, he set convention utterly at naught, despised and refused rules and models, and aimed, first of all, at the vague suggestion, as he would have said, of truth, as we may put it, of beauty. The presence in both of familiarity with Biblical images and phrase, and perhaps the presence also of madness in both, make a certain superficial resemblance between Blake and Christopher Smart, but it is mainly superficial. Blake really belongs to, and is almost, if not quite, the chief of, that small but very precious band of poets who are even more under the influence of Queen Mab than under that of the Muses. He is elf-ridden, but his tyrants have more than compensated him for the tricks they play, by touching his lips with the gift of elfin music.

The fourth, Robert Burns,[1] to a gift of poetry at its best hardly inferior to Blake's, and far fuller, as well as more various, consistent, intense, and human, added the possession of a certain national and inherited capital and faculty which makes him one of the most interesting figures in literary history. He was born in the "blast o' Janwar win'," from which he drew unpleasant omens, at the beginning of 1759, and his father was a very small farmer, of extraction rather more northern than the part of Scotland (the Kyle district of Ayrshire) which saw his son's birth. Robert was fairly educated, and though kept to the plough-tail, early developed

Burns.

[1] Editions, selections, criticisms, and biographies innumerable. For this very reason perhaps, in the case of no poet is the bare text (with glossary, if necessary) more to be preferred, by the beginner at any rate.

his two great inclinations, for love and for literature. But he was twenty-seven before he published, in 1786, at Kilmarnock, his first volume of poems, and, had it been only a little less successful, he had intended to expatriate himself. The book, however, brought him some money and a great deal of fame; and a winter of welcome in Edinburgh sent him back to marry Jean Armour, the most permanent of his many loves, to settle at Ellisland, in Dumfriesshire, on a small farm, and to combine it with a post in the excise, which latterly formed his main support. Burns, though a good deal too much stir has been made about his delinquencies (which in one direction were those of almost all classes in his time, and in another were of the class of which a poet is tempted to convey an exaggerated idea to his readers), was a wiser man in theory than in conduct, and the political and ecclesiastical, no less than the social, accidents of his time and country contributed to his mistakes and misfortunes in life. He died in July 1796, broken in health and fortune, but with a reputation absolutely safe as far as literature is concerned, and exercising an influence the greatness of which was hardly recognised even by those who felt it most.

In estimating both the positive and the historical importance of Burns as a poet, we must keep these carefully apart from his position as a national favourite. It is certainly no small thing to have thus given literary expression and form to the most cherished tastes and feelings of a whole people. Yet this touches the accidents, rather than the essentials, of poetry and of literature generally, and does not affect either his positive excellence or his unique historical value. This latter depends upon the fact that he came just at the time when the constantly tightening bonds between Scotland and England were to some extent obliterating the distinctive Scottish characteristics, and when oral ballad literature was being killed in order that it might be preserved to us by the press.

His predecessors from Ramsay to Fergusson.

As we have seen, Scottish poetry during the eighteenth century had had a very important effect on English indirectly and by stimulation; but the actual offspring of the Scottish muse, since Allan Ramsay (1686-1758) consoled her long widowhood, had been rather interesting than important. This is especially the case with Ramsay's own original work. The famous *Gentle Shepherd* (1725), a pastoral "by personages," in the Old French phrase, rather than a drama, contains some charming description and some pleasant painting of manners, but is not strong, while most of his other work is distinctly weak. But he had some share, and not a few followers—Hamilton of Bangour (1704-54), Alexander Ross (1698-1784), John Skinner (1721-1807), Isabel Pagan (1740-1821), Lady Anne Barnard (1750-1825)—had

much more—of the strange, not easily analysed, and hardly at all literary, gift of folk-song, which it is perhaps academic to try to distinguish rigidly from poetry. We are scarcely able—and perhaps we do not greatly care—to set down the exact debt of such things as Lady Anne's "Auld Robin Gray" and Isabel Pagan's "Ca' the yowes to the knowes" to the exquisite plaintive notes from which they can never be divided in memory. But the efficacy of such things in keeping alive a sense of the poetic "over-soul" cannot be exaggerated. Robert Fergusson (1750-74), Michael Bruce (1746-67), and John Logan (1748-88) approach literature nearer, but at the forfeit of poetry. The first wrote partly in dialect, was adopted by Burns as his master, and has been a good deal over-praised, though he has no small merit, especially in some Edinburgh pieces and in "The Gowdspink" (goldfinch). Another bird, the Cuckoo, acted up to its reputation by inspiring a good, though not consummate, copy of verses, which has been challenged by the champions of Bruce and Logan for both those writers. In such a quarrel, especially as the authorship is of infinitesimal importance, no wise man takes a side. Bruce died young, and certainly wrote some pleasing verse; Logan, his friend, literary executor, and (as one theory holds) supplanter, died in early middle age, and seems to have had rather more talent than conduct. But all the poets of the paragraph must rest their main claim to historic interest on the fact that they exemplify, and that they handed on, the vague poetic inspiration which was to take definite form in Burns.

This he caught up, and, with an intense and sovereign poetical power, fixed, without killing, all the floating folk-poetry of Scotland, effecting this to no small extent by the felicitous audacity (to which a writer of more academic cultivation could hardly have attained) of actually keeping much of the old, while he purged what he kept of dross, and added new gold of his own.

Burns was a prose-writer as well as a poet, and took much pains with his prose letters. But, though clever, they are distinctly artificial, and their biographical value far exceeds their value as literature.

His poetic quality.

This is also, though not so universally, the case with those of his poems which were written in literary English. He had not proved this medium, and though nothing that he wrote could well be quite valueless, he has, when he has gotten to his English, not much more value than belongs to the usual eighteenth-century poet of the better class. In fact, here as elsewhere, he resembles Chatterton. With his poems in Scots the case is entirely different. Here he did not merely bring to bear the inherited attention to, and familiarity with, nature, which has been noted throughout as characteristic of Scottish poetry; indeed, though

he is strong in this, it is not his strongest point. What he brought was first of all the accumulated virtue of Scots verse and phrase, so different from English, and therefore so invaluable as an alterative; and secondly his own special poetic gift.

Even the mere fact that his favourite metres (especially the popular form which, coming directly, and by something of an exception, from a Provençal original, established itself for good in Scots in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) were constantly different from anything usual in English, must be allowed its importance. The dialect, so rich in quaint special words, that of themselves break through and transform the hackneyed generalities of eighteenth-century diction; the sharply observed and faithfully transcribed customs and characters; the peculiar imagery,—all these must be counted in to understand the charm and the value of *The Twa Dogs* and *The Twa Herds*, of *The Brigs of Ayr* and *Death and Dr. Hornbook*, of *The Cotter's Saturday Night* and *The Jolly Beggars*, as well as of the innumerable scraps of song which, more than anything else, have earned Burns his immortality.

But there is much in the poetry of Burns besides dialect and local colour, fresh versification, and special scenery, and though this much is of the indefinable kind, of the kind that escapes all analysis, one thing about it can be said with confidence, that it was essentially lyrical, and another, that lyric was what was chiefly needed to melt the eighteenth-century frost. From the death or silence of the last Cavalier singers about a hundred years earlier, there had been in English no serious lyric of an impassioned kind that possessed the highest qualities of music in verse, there had not even been any approach to such verse. But it not only existed in Burns; it was almost impossible for him to open his mouth, to dip pen in ink, without producing it. He had positively to constrain himself, to keep his eyes fixed on some false model, to cramp and force his voice into alien speech, before he could become prosaic, or even produce the kinds of poetry that are nearest to prose. They do him a great wrong and make a great mistake, who dwell upon his politics, his philosophy, or anything but his poetry. As a matter of fact, Burns felt and saw too much to have much time for thinking, even if he had been educated that way. And very fortunate this is. The time did not want thought; it wanted nature and song, and he gave it both.

Except for these four great writers, the poetical production of the last two decades of the century, till the *Lyrical Ballads* themselves, was all but of the lowest order. The handful of sonnets, meditative and topographical, published by William Bowles[1] in 1789, had extraordinary

[1] Bowles (1762-1850) published much verse later, but nothing of importance. His edition (and depreciation) of Pope had some.

influence on Coleridge and on other poets, and show very strongly the *nisus*, the still inorganic effort of the age towards local colour, the "proper word," the linking of nature-aspect to human feeling, and other characteristics of Romanticism. The unrhymed Pindarics of Sayers, not in themselves very good things, though they produced good work by the hands of his followers, Southey and Shelley, showed in the same way the revolt against the smooth tyranny of the rhymed couplet, the craving for something different, which shows itself at the beginning of each new poetic age. But the main bulk of the verse of the time, which has not passed utterly out of even historic memory, consists of satiric work. To this class belong the clever lampoons [1] of the *Rolliad*, directed against the younger Pitt, the more varied and bulky, but even less poetic, work of "Peter Pindar," and, above all, the triumphant, and, as literature if not exactly as poetry, wholly admirable, parodies and diatribes of the *Anti-Jacobin*, the chief contributors to which were Canning, Ellis, and Frere, while it was edited by William Gifford (1756-1826), a rough critic and a jejune versifier, but the author earlier of two extremely clever satires, the *Baviad* and *Maeviad*, and the editor later of some of the great dramatists and of the *Quarterly Review*.

[1] But for the tyranny of space a chapter might be occupied, with pleasure at least to the writer, by the lighter verse of this century. As noted more than once, more than one poet, mediocre in serious work, has left charming light things. Of those who are light or nothing, the chief are Isaac Hawkins Browne (1706-60), whose *Pipe of Tobacco* (1736) is a delightful string of parodies on the chief poets of the day; Christopher Anstey (1724-1805), who in *The New Bath Guide* (1766) took the four-footed anapæstic from Prior, gave it a new tune, and established it for a century and a half to come as the best vehicle for certain purposes; Sir Charles Hanbury Williams (1709-59), a coarse lampooner, whose poems, not published till 1822, have been rather overrated for wit and style; and Sterne's disreputable friend John Hall Stevenson (1718-85), whose *Crazy Tales*, etc., are as coarse as Williams's but much cleverer, and who could *see*, as his description of the Scotch fir on the Cleveland moors—

> That waves its arms and makes a stir,
> And tosses its fantastic head—

shows sufficiently. Of the persons named above, "Peter Pindar" was John Wolcot (1738-1819), who professed both physic and divinity, and during the last twenty years of the century lampooned George III., the new Royal Academy, Tory ministers, and things and persons generally. George Ellis (1753-1815) gave his talent in satirical verse first to the Whigs in the *Rolliad*, then to the Tories in the *Anti-Jacobin*, but did his best service to literature in the *Specimens* of poetry and romance referred to earlier. Canning (1770-1827) belongs primarily to history. John Hookham Frere (1760-1846) was a man of very great talent, chiefly spent on translations, "skits," and the remarkable burlesque romance (variously referred to as "Whistlecraft," from the *nom de guerre* assumed, "*The Monks and the Giants*," etc.) on *King Arthur and the Round Table*, which gave Byron the metre and style of *Beppo* and *Don Juan*, and is not exceeded by either in spirit and art.

In serious poetry the standard names—names, alas! standing rather as marks for scorn than as objects of veneration—are those of Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) and William Hayley (1745-1820), the former, in his *Botanic Garden* (1789-92), the last and one of the most polished, but also one of the most frigid and unpoetic, of the descriptive couplet-writers, the latter a respectable and amiable dilettante, who wrote bombastic or namby-pamby verse with a fatal facility. Below them, if indeed in these regions of poetry higher and lower are predicable terms, we come to degrees of dulness or absurdity, ending in the so-called "Della Cruscans," who were the object of Gifford's scorn, a group of versifiers at the head of whom was Robert Merry (1755-98), a man of good education and some parts, whose exploits in poetastry show better perhaps than anything else the poetical degradation, or rather exhaustion, of the time.

CHAPTER II

THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL

Richardson—Fielding—Smollett—Sterne—Minor novelists—Walpole—Beckford—Mrs. Radcliffe—Lewis

SOME reference has been made earlier to the differences, or rather the hesitations, of opinion in reference to the exact history of the English novel.[1] But for general purposes these may be neglected. The early prose romance, the Euphuist innovation, major and minor, the philosophical or Utopian fantasy, the brief Elizabethan tale, the long-winded translations or imitations of the Scudéry Heroic story, the picaresque miscellany, and the like, are stages obvious as the general history unfolds itself. As to the exact position which the great names of Bunyan and of Defoe hold, difference may be agreed to with resignation. What is certain is that about the beginning of the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the period immediately succeeding the appearance of Defoe's work, there began a development of the prose novel, and that this, partly though by no means wholly owing to one group of great writers in the style, had made very great progress by the beginning of the third, about which time we find Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in Italy receiving boxes full of new novels from her daughter in England.

It is so difficult to mark out the precise stages by which the modern novel came into being, that the wisest critics have abstained from attempting it. We can only say that, for the nearly three generations which passed between the Restoration and the publication of Richardson's *Pamela*, there was an ever greater determination and concentration towards completed prose fiction; and that the use of the general form in two such different ways by two such different men as Swift and Defoe is sufficient proof how near, by the end of the second decade or so, that completed form was. But

[1] See Mr. now Sir Walter Raleigh's excellent *The English Novel* (London, 1894). The present writer has also written on the subject.

there was not much general practice of it.[1] Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Haywood, women of no very good reputation, followed in the footsteps of Afra Behn, and achieved a certain popularity, but the novels of the former are thinly-veiled political libels. The earlier books of Mrs. Haywood are in seventeenth-century styles, and though she lived to do better in *Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (1753), these were not published till long after the three great re-creators of the novel had shown the way. To them, therefore, we may as well turn at once.

Richardson.

Samuel Richardson, by a great deal the oldest, by a little the precursor in actual publication, and indirectly the inspirer of his greatest and nearest successor, was born in 1689 in Derbyshire, his father being a joiner, his mother of rather higher rank. He went to Charterhouse, and was apprenticed in 1706 to a printer, whose daughter he afterwards married. After setting up for himself he became very prosperous, had a house in Salisbury Court, Fleet Street, and another first at North End, then at Parson's Green, was Master of the Stationers' Company in 1754, and King's Printer in 1761. A year later he died of apoplexy. He was contented for many years to print books without writing them, and he was past fifty when a commission or suggestion from two well-known London publishers, Rivington and Osborne, for a sort of *Model Letter-writer* (he had in his youth practised as an amateur in this art) led to the composition of *Pamela*, which (at least the first part of it) was published in 1740, and became very popular. Richardson had already made some acquaintance with persons of a station superior to his own, and the fame of his book enlarged this, while it also tempted him to fly higher. In 1748 he produced *Clarissa*, which is usually considered his masterpiece, and in 1753 *Sir Charles Grandison*. Except one paper in *The Adventurer*, he published nothing else, but left an enormous mass of correspondence. *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, gives the history of a girl of low degree who, resisting temptation, marries her master, and in the second and less good part reclaims him from irregular courses; *Clarissa*, that of a young lady of family and fortune, who, partly by imprudence, partly by misfortune, falls a prey to the arts of the libertine Lovelace and, resisting his offers of marriage, dies of a broken heart, to be revenged in a duel by her cousin; *Sir Charles Grandison*, that of a young man of still higher family and larger fortune, who is almost faultless, and

[1] The minor novels of the eighteenth century are not generally accessible save in the original editions. There is, indeed, one useful and rather full collection, *Harrison's Novelists*, but, as a whole, it is very bulky, and duplicates much that every one has on his shelves in other forms. Richardson has been sometimes, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and Miss Burney have been often, reprinted.

constantly successful in all his endeavours, and who, after being the object of the adoration of two beautiful girls, the Italian Clementina della Porretta and the English Harriet Byron, condescends to make the latter happy. Richardson's expressed, and beyond the slightest doubt his sincere, purpose in all was, not to produce works of art, but to enforce lessons of morality. Yet posterity, while pronouncing his morals somewhat musty and even at times a little rancid, has recognised him as a great, though by no means an impeccable, artist. It is noteworthy that his popularity was as great abroad as at home—indeed it far exceeded that which any English writer, except Scott and Byron, has obtained on the Continent during his lifetime. His adoption of the letter-form influenced novelists very powerfully, and though his style and spirit were less imitable, there is no doubt that they practically founded the novel of analysis and feeling, as distinguished from the romance of adventure.

His faults are an excessive long-windedness (*Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* are by far the longest novels of great merit in English, if not in any language), an inability, which grew upon him, to construct a story with any diversified and constantly lively interest, an almost total lack of humour, and a teasing and meticulous minuteness of sentimental analysis, and history of motive and mood. To these Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a formidable critic, added, justly enough, though not so importantly from our point of view as from hers, an ignorance of the society which, in his two later novels, he endeavours to depict. His merits, on the other hand, are a faculty of vivid, though too elaborate, presentation of the outward accessories of his scenes ; a real, though somewhat limp, grasp of conversation ; an intense, though not very varied or extensive, mastery of pathos ; and, above all, a one-sided, partial, but intimate and true, knowledge of human motive, sentiment, and even conduct, his time being considered. The proviso is necessary ; and the overlooking of it (with perhaps some personal reasons) was at the bottom of Johnson's now almost incomprehensible preference of Richardson over Fielding. Richardson knew the feminine character of his time with a quite extraordinary thoroughness and accuracy, though his men are much less good ; whereas Fielding knew both men and women first, eighteenth-century men and women only afterwards, and, however well, in a minor degree. Nor, though Johnson had plenty of humour himself, was he likely to resent the absence of it in Richardson, as he resented the presence of a kind different from his own in Fielding.

Great, however, as are Richardson's qualities, and immense as was the impetus which his popularity and his merits combined gave to the English novel, he cannot be said to have given that novel

anything like a final or universal form. The scheme of letters, though presenting to the novelist some obvious advantages and conveniences, which have secured it not merely immediate imitation but continuance even to the present day, has disadvantages as obvious, and can never rise to the merits of prose narrative from the outside.[1] But it is one of not the least curiosities of literature that the attainment of the true and highest form actually resulted from an exercise in parody, which certainly cannot be regarded as in itself a very high, and has sometimes been regarded as almost the lowest, form of literature. It is less curious, and much less unexampled, that the author of this parody was a man who had already tried, with no very distinguished success, quite different kinds of writing.

Henry Fielding was born at Sharpham Park, in the south of Somerset, on 22nd April 1707. His birth was higher than that of any man of letters of all work who had preceded him. The house of Fielding claimed kindred with that of Hapsburg; it had ranked among English gentry since the twelfth century; and in the century before the novelist's birth it had been ennobled by two peerages, the earldom of Denbigh in England and that of Desmond in Ireland. Henry Fielding himself was great-grandson of the first Earl of Desmond of this creation, but was, of course, unconnected with the great Geraldines who came to an end when they rebelled against Elizabeth. His grandfather was a canon of Salisbury, his father a general in the army who had seen service under Marlborough; his mother's father was a Justice of the King's Bench, and it was at his house that the novelist was born. Nor is it to be omitted that he was a near cousin of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whose mother was a Fielding.

Fielding.

But though his pedigree was thus undeniable, his immediate forebears had for two generations been younger sons, and his own patrimony was little or nothing. He was, indeed, well educated at Eton and at Leyden, but he seems to have found himself at twenty-one in London with a nominal allowance and no particular interest for any profession, though, like other young gentlemen, he was of the Inns of Court. He turned to the stage, and for not quite ten years produced a large number of plays, neither very bad nor very good, of which *Tom Thumb*, a burlesque "tragedy of tragedies," is perhaps the best, and certainly the only one which has kept any reputation. About 1735 he seems to have married a Miss Charlotte Craddock, who was very beautiful, very amiable, and an heiress in a small way; but whether, as legend asserts, Fielding really set up for a country gentleman on the strength of her fortune, and spent it

[1] In combination it can do wondrously, as in *Redgauntlet*.

on hounds and showy liveries, is quite uncertain. His theatrical enterprises being interfered with by some new legislation in 1737, he turned seriously to the law, was called to the Bar, and practised, or at least went on circuit, while in 1739 he contributed largely to the *Champion*, a paper on the *Spectator* pattern.[1] His first-published, though probably not his first-written novel, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*, appeared in February 1742, when its author was almost exactly thirty-five. It was successful, and next year Fielding published three volumes of *Miscellanies*, the important parts of which are *A Journey from this World to the Next*, in the Lucianic manner which Tom Brown had made popular, and the mighty ironic story of *Jonathan Wild*. His wife died soon after this publication, and he married again, but not for some years afterwards. He returned to periodical essay-writing (the *True Patriot* and the *Jacobite's Journal*) in '45 on the Whig side, and in 1749 he produced his third and greatest novel, *Tom Jones*. Meanwhile Lyttelton had obtained for him the position of Bow Street Magistrate, as it was called, or Justice of the Peace for Westminster, an office which, though poorly paid, was of enormous importance, for its holder practically had the police of London, outside the City walls, in his hands. He discharged its duties to admiration, and found time not merely to publish his last novel, *Amelia*, in 1751, but to conduct the *Covent Garden Journal* for the greater part of 1752. His health, however, was ruined, and, trying to restore it by travel, he undertook in June 1754 the voyage to Lisbon which forms the subject of his last book, issued after his death. He reached the Portuguese capital in August, but died on the 8th of October.

Fielding's first novel started as a deliberate burlesque of *Pamela*. Its hero is the brother of Richardson's heroine, and her trials are transferred to this Joseph. Nor did Fielding ostensibly give up his scheme throughout the book; but his genius was altogether too great to allow him to remain in the narrow and beggarly elements of parody, and after the first few chapters we forget all about Richardson's ideals and morals. The great character of Mr. Abraham Adams—a poor curate, extremely unworldly, but no fool, a scholar, a tall man of his hands, and a very Good Samaritan of ordinary life—is only the centre and chief of a crowd of wonderfully lifelike characters, all of whom perform their parts with a verisimilitude which had never

[1] Fielding's dramatic, periodical, and miscellaneous works must be sought in the original editions, the best of which is in 4 vols. 4to (London, 1762), or in the great *édition de luxe* of Mr. Leslie Stephen. The present writer attempted a selection from them in the last volume of an issue of the novels, the *Journey*, and the *Voyage*, which he superintended (12 vols. London, 1893).

been seen before off the stage, and very seldom there ; while the new scheme of narrative gave an infinitely wider and more varied scope than the stage ever could give. Moreover, one of the instruments of this vivid presentation—an instrument the play of which not seldom sufficed in itself to make the literary result—was a very peculiar irony, almost as intense as Swift's, though less bitter, indeed hardly bitter at all, and dealing with life in a fashion which, but for being much more personal and much less poetic, is very nearly of the same kind as Shakespeare's.

In his next published book, *Jonathan Wild*, this irony predominates, and is more severe. The hero was a historical personage, an audacious and ingenious blend of thief and thief-taker, who had been hanged ten years earlier. Fielding's ostensible object in composing an imaginary party-history of him was to satirise the ideas of "greatness" entertained by the ordinary historian—a design showing not imitation of, but sympathy with, certain ways of thought diversely illustrated by Swift and Voltaire. But his genius, intensely creative, once more broke away from this ideal—though the ironic side of *Jonathan Wild* is stronger than anything else in English or any literature outside the *Tale of a Tub*, and so strong that the book has probably on the whole shocked, pained, or simply puzzled more readers than it has pleased. But it is really as full of live personages as *Joseph Andrews* itself; and if these, being drawn almost entirely from the basest originals, cannot be so agreeable as the not more true but far more sympathetic characters of the earlier-published novel, they are, as literature, equally great, and perhaps more astonishing.

It was, however, in his third and longest novel, *Tom Jones*, that Fielding attained a position unquestionable by anything save mere prejudice or mere crotchet. *Joseph Andrews* had been, at least in inception, only a parody, and *Jonathan Wild* mainly a satire ; the former, though not destitute of plot, had had but an ordinary and sketchy one, and the latter chiefly adapted actual facts to a series of lifelike but not necessarily connected episodes. *Tom Jones*, on the contrary, is as artfully constructed as the most nicely proportioned drama, and, long as it is, there is hardly a character or an incident (with the exception of some avowed episodic passages, made tolerable and almost imperative by the taste of the day and the supposed example of the classical epic) which is not strictly adjusted to the attainment of the story's end. To us, perhaps, this is a less attraction than the vividness of the story itself, the extraordinarily lifelike presentation of character, and (though this is a charm less universally admitted) the piquancy of the introductory passages. In these—after a manner no doubt copied from the parabases or addresses to

the audience in the chorus of the older Attic comedy, and itself serving, beyond all doubt likewise, as a model to the later asides of Thackeray—Fielding takes occasion sometimes to discuss his own characters, sometimes to deal with more general points. But the characters themselves, and the vivacity with which they are set to work, are the thing. The singular humanity of Tom Jones himself, a scapegrace even according to the ideas of his time, but a good fellow; the benevolence, not mawkish or silly, of Allworthy; the charms and generosity of Sophia; the harmless foibles of Miss Western, the aunt, and the coarse but not offensive clownishness of her brother, the Squire, with the humours of Partridge the schoolmaster, and others, have always satisfied good judges. Even among the black sheep, Lady Bellaston, shameless as she is, is a lady; and at the other end of the scale, Black George, rascal as he is, is a man. Only perhaps the villain Blifil is not exactly human, not so much by reason of his villainy, as because Fielding, for some reason, has chosen to leave him so.

There is somewhat less power and life in *Amelia*, though its sketches of London society in the lower and middle classes are singularly vivid, and though the character of the heroine as an amiable wife, not so much forgiving injuries as ignoring their commission, has been almost idolised by some. But no other novelist of the time—and by this the novelists were numerous—could have written it.

On the whole, if we are to pronounce the novel as such present for the first time in the pages of any writer, it must be in those of Fielding rather than in those of Richardson. Johnson, in his prejudice, endeavoured to set the latter above the former by comparing Fielding to a man who can only tell the time, and Richardson to one who can put together the watch. The point may be very stoutly argued; but if it be admitted, it can be turned against Johnson. For Fielding does tell the clock of nature with absolute and universal correctness, while Richardson's ingenious machinery sometimes strikes twenty-five o'clock, and constantly gives us seconds, thirds, and other troublesome details instead of putting us in possession of the useful time of day. And in fact the comparison itself will not really hold water. Fielding does not parade his mechanism as Richardson does, but his command of it is every whit as true, and in reality as delicate. He first in English,[1] he thoroughly, and he in a manner unsurpassable, put humanity into fictitious working after such a fashion that the effect hitherto produced only by the dramatist and poet, the practical re-creation and presentation of life, was

[1] "In English," for, as he himself was eager to confess, Cervantes in Spanish had not merely preceded him, but had served as his model.

achieved in the larger and fuller manner possible only to the prose novelist.

The novels of Tobias George Smollett relapse in appearance and general plan upon a form—that of the "picaresque" or adventure-novel—older than that of Fielding or even of Richardson; but in reality they contributed largely to the development of the new fiction. Their author was born in 1721 at Dalquhurn, in the West of Scotland, and was a member of a good family, of which, had he lived a little longer, he would have become the head. He was born, however, the younger son of a younger son, and the harsh treatment of Roderick Random by his relations has been thought to reflect upon his own grandfather, Sir James Smollett of Bonhill, Judge of the Commissary Court of Scotland, M.P., and Commissioner for the Union. However this may be, Smollett, though well educated, had to make his own way in the world, and was apprenticed to a Glasgow surgeon. He practised at different times during his life, but his real profession was literature, by which he set out to make his fortune in London at the age of eighteen. He did not make it with a bad and boyish tragedy, *The Regicide*,[1] but took the place of surgeon's mate on board a man-of-war in the Carthagena expedition of 1740. He does not seem to have served long, but remained for some years in the West Indies, and probably there married his wife, Anne Lascelles, an heiress in a small way. Returning, he tried poems and plays with no success, and then in 1748 turned to novel-writing with a great deal, as the deserved reward of *Roderick Random*. Smollett.

From this time onward Smollett was a novelist by taste and genius, and a man of letters of all work by necessity. In the former capacity he wrote and published *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), *Ferdinand, Count Fathom* (1753), *Sir Lancelot Greaves* in 1760, and in 1771 *Humphrey Clinker*. In the latter he edited the *Critical Review*, wrote a very popular and profitable *History of England*, gave an account, in an ill-tempered but not uninteresting book, of his *Travels* in France and Italy, and did a great deal of miscellaneous work, including a fierce and foul, but rather dull, political lampoon, *The Adventures of an Atom*. His health, between hard work and the hard living then usual, broke down early, and making a second visit to Italy, he died at Leghorn in October 1771.

Smollett's miscellaneous work, though almost always competent,

[1] Smollett's plays and poems are seldom reprinted with the numerous editions of his novels, but may be found in Chalmers; his *History* is on all the stalls; his criticisms and miscellaneous works have never been, and are never likely to be, collected in full, though the late Mr. W. E. Henley gave some. The *Travels*, which are worth reading, have been more than once reprinted.

and sometimes much more, need not detain us; his novels, excellent in themselves, are of the highest historical importance. It has been said that he fell back on the adventure-scheme. Plot he hardly attempted; and even, as regards incident, he probably, as Thackeray says, "did not invent much," his own varied experiences and his sharp eye for humorous character giving him abundant material. In *Roderick Random* he uses his naval experiences, and perhaps others, to furnish forth the picture of a young Scotchman, arrogant, unscrupulous, and not too amiable, but bold and ready enough; in *Peregrine Pickle* he gives that of a spendthrift scapegrace, heir to wealth; in *Fathom* he draws a professional *chevalier d'industrie*. The strange fancy which made him attempt a sort of "New Quixote" in *Sir Lancelot Greaves* has seldom been regarded as happy, either in inception or in result; but in *Humphrey Clinker* we have the very best of all his works. It is written in the letter form, the scenes and humours of many places in England and Scotland are rendered with admirable picturesqueness, while the book has seldom been excelled for humorous character of the broad and farcical kind. Matthew Bramble, the testy hypochondriac squire who is at heart one of the best of men, and in head not one of the foolishest; his sour-visaged and greedy sister Tabitha; her maid Winifred Jenkins, who has learnt the art of grotesque misspelling from Swift's Mrs. Harris, and has improved upon the teaching; the Scotch soldier of fortune, Lismahago,—these are among the capital figures of English fiction, as in the earlier books are the Welsh surgeon's mate Morgan, Commodore Trunnion, and others.

Besides this conception of humorous if somewhat rough character, and a remarkable faculty of drawing interiors which accompanies it, and in which he perhaps even excels Fielding, Smollett made two very important contributions to the English novel. The first was the delineation of national types in which he, almost for the first time, reduced and improved the stock exaggerations of the stage to a human and artistic temper. The second, not less important, was the introduction, under proper limitations, of the professional interest. He had, though less of universality than Fielding, yet enough of it to be successful with types in which he had only observation, not experiment, to guide him, but he was naturally most fortunate with what he knew from experience, sailors and "medical gentlemen." Until his time the sailor had been drawn almost entirely from the outside in English literature. Smollett first gives him to us in his habit as he lived, and long continued to live. To these great merits must be added one or two drawbacks—a hardness and roughness of tone approaching ferocity, and not more distinguished from the somewhat epicene temper of Richardson than from the manly but

kindly spirit of Fielding, and an extreme coarseness of imagery and language—a coarseness which can hardly be called immoral, but which is sometimes positively revolting.

One element, however, or one special commixture of elements, remained to be added in fiction, and then (if we except such minor varieties as the terror-novel to be handled shortly) it remained with no important addition or progress until the day of Scott and Miss Austen within the nineteenth century. This was supplied, that the three kingdoms might be separately and proportionately represented, by Laurence Sterne,[1] an Irishman by birth at least, and something of an Irishman in temperament. The Sternes were an East-Anglian family which, after a member became Archbishop of York in the seventeenth century, was chiefly connected with Yorkshire. Laurence was the son of Roger Sterne, a captain in the army, who was the younger son of Simon Sterne of Elrington, third son of the Archbishop, and he was born at Clonmel, where his father was quartered, in 1713, was educated at Halifax, and went thence to Jesus College, Cambridge, of which, many years before, the Archbishop had been Master. He took his degree in 1736, and orders soon afterwards, receiving the livings of Sutton and Stillington as well as minor preferment in York chapter. He married Elizabeth Lumley in 1741, and for some twenty years seems to have felt, or at any rate indulged, no literary ambition. But on New Year's Day 1760 there appeared in York and London the first volume of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.* It was immediately popular, it made its author a lion in the capital, and it turned his attention definitely to literary work, society, and foreign travel. During the remaining nine years of his life he continued *Tristram Shandy* at intervals, issued some volumes of *Sermons*, travelled and resided abroad, and embodied some of the results of this travel in *A Sentimental Journey*. This last appeared only just before his death, after some previous escapes from lung disease, on 18th March 1768.

Sterne.

Sterne's work—his *Sermons* even to some degree, his two novels to a much greater—is the most deliberately and ostentatiously eccentric in the higher ranges of English literature; and being so, contains an element of mere trick, which inevitably impairs its value. If a man will not, and does not, produce his effects without such mechanical devices as continual dashes, stars, points, and stopped sentences, even blank pages, blackened pages, marbled pages, and the like, he must lay his account with the charge that he cannot

[1] The standard edition of Sterne—novels, sermons, and not quite complete letters—is in 10 vols. The work other than the novels has been often omitted in reprints; but, as in the case of Fielding, the present writer has arranged a selection from it in 2 vols. (London, 1894).

produce them without such apparatus. The charge, however, is in Sterne's case unjust; for though the "clothes-philosophy" of his style is fantastically adjusted, there is a real body both of style and of matter beneath.

Tristram Shandy, the pretended history of a personage who rarely appears, is, in fact, a "rigmarole" of partly original, partly borrowed humour, arranged in the style which the French call *fatrasie*, and of which Rabelais' great books are the most familiar, though not quite the normal, type. Although Tristram himself is the shadow of a shade, Sterne manages to present the most vivid character-pictures of his father, Walter Shandy, and his Uncle Toby (the latter the author's most famous, if not his greatest, creation), together with others, not much less achieved, of Corporal Trim, Uncle Toby's servant and comrade in the Marlborough wars, Mrs. Shandy, Widow Wadman, Dr. Slop, and others. And he thus gives a real novel-substance to a book which could otherwise hardly pretend to the title of novel at all. The *Sentimental Journey*, a pretended (and no doubt partly real) autobiographic account of a journey through France to the Italian frontier, is planned on no very different general principle, and has its own medallions of character, though they are less elaborately worked and less closely grouped.

Both books depend for their literary effect on a large number of means—out-of-the-way reading, of which Sterne availed himself with a freedom which has brought upon him the charge of plagiarism; very real though occasionally exaggerated pathos; a curiously fertile though not extremely varied fancy; and a considerable indulgence, not in coarseness of the Smollettian kind, but in indecent hint and innuendo. But their main appeal lies in two things—a kind of humour which, though sometimes artificial and seldom reaching the massive and yet mobile humanity of Fielding, has a singular trick of grace, and a really intimate knowledge of human nature, combined and contrasted with a less natural quality, to which France at the time gave the name of "Sensibility" and England that of "Sentiment." It was this last which gave Sterne his immediate popularity, though perhaps for a generation or two past that popularity has been rather endangered by it; and it is still this which gives him his most distinct place, though not his greatest value, in literary history. For it, like the prominence of a less definite kind of the same quality in Richardson, shows the reaction from the rather excessive hardness and prosaic character of the earlier decades. This reaction was not yet directed in the right way. It was still powdered and patched, deliberate, artificial, fashionable. It bore to true passion very much the same relation which the mannerism of *Ossian* bore to true romance, and Strawberry Hill Gothic to real Pointed architecture.

It was theatrical and mawkish; it sometimes toppled over into the ludicrous, or the disgusting, or both. But it shows at worst a blind groping after something that could touch the heart as well as amuse the head.

Perhaps it was the popularity of Richardson and Fielding, as early as the first years of the fifth decade of the century, but more probably the *aura* or prevalent tendency of general thought, which brought about a great expansion and multiplication of the novel about 1750.[1] Few of the minor results of this retain much reputation even with students of the subject, and most are not over-accessible. Some of them have obtained an additional prop from the mention and criticism of Lady Mary (*vide supra et infra*). We have mentioned Mrs. Haywood's books. Francis Coventry's *Pompey the Little* (1751) was the most amusing, as Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal, or the Adventures of a Guinea* (1760) was the most powerful, of a kind of personal fiction whereof a memorable example survives in the *Memoirs of a Lady of Quality*, inserted (one regrets to say for money) by Smollett in *Peregrine Pickle*, and doubtless rewritten by him from the materials of the beautiful and liberal Viscountess Vane. The too notorious Dr. Dodd attempted to combine Sterne and Smollett, and succeeded in combining the most objectionable parts of each without any of their genius, in *The Sisters;* Dr. Hawkesworth followed Dr. Johnson with steps of his usual inequality in *Almoran and Hamet* (1761). But the most interesting work in fiction of the middle of the century is to be found in two books, eccentric in more senses than one, *John Buncle* (1750-66) and *The Fool of Quality* (1766-70). The first was the work, though by no means the only work, of a curious Irishman named Thomas Amory, who was born in 1691 and died in 1788, who assures us that he was intimate with Swift, and on whom it would be extremely interesting to have Swift's opinion. Amory began in 1755 with a book, not improbably composed on French models and called *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain.* But this, though interesting, pales before the *Life of John Buncle, Esq.* The hero is an enthusiastic Unitarian, the husband of seven (or eight) beautiful wives, a man of letters in a way, a man of science, and distinctly marked with the madness which no doubt existed in a temperate and intangible form in his

Minor novelists.

[1] Most of the books mentioned from this point to the end of the chapter will be found in the above-noted collection of Harrison, or in Scott's Ballantyne novels, sometimes in both. The latter, in ten capacious but unwieldy volumes, contains all the four great novelists (including Smollett's translations), the *Adventures of a Guinea*, Johnson's, Walpole's, and Goldsmith's novels, Mackenzie, Bage, Mrs. Radcliffe, *Gulliver's Travels*, Cumberland's *Henry*, and Clara Reeve's *Old English Baron*.

creator. The book, which is entirely *sui generis*, fascinated Hazlitt, and has been reprinted, but never widely read.

A much more respectable and an almost equally interesting book, though a worse novel, seeing that it attempts innumerable things which the novel cannot manage, is *The Fool of Quality*. The author of this, Henry Brooke, was like Amory an Irishman, was born in County Cavan in 1703, and died at Dublin in 1783. He was, also like Amory, mad, and died so. He had money, education, and abundant ability, while in his earlier manhood he was familiar with the best literary society of London. In 1735 he published a poem called *Universal Beauty*, which is worth notice, though it has been too highly praised; four years later a play, *Gustavus Vasa*. *The Fool of Quality, or the Adventures of Henry, Earl of Morland*, is a wholly unpractical book and a chaotic history, but admirably written, full of shrewdness and wit, and of a singularly chivalrous tone. Nor must we leave out the really exquisite *Peter Wilkins*, of an almost unknown author, Robert Paltock, which appeared in 1751. In conception it was a sort of following of *Gulliver*, but Paltock has little satire and no misanthropy, and the charm of his book, which once was a boys' book, and now delights some men, depends on his ingenious wonders, and on the character of the flying girl Youwarkee, the only heroine (except Fielding's) of the eighteenth-century novel who has very distinct charm.

The contributions of Johnson and Goldsmith to the novel will be best mentioned with their other work. But the history, as we can give it here, of eighteenth-century fiction proper is incomplete without a notice of the curious terror-novel which, anticipated by Horace Walpole, had its special time in the last decade of the century, the work of Fanny Burney, that of Mackenzie, and some others. Walpole himself will occupy us later. The incongruity of most of his work and character with the *Castle of Otranto* has always attracted and puzzled critics; nor is there perhaps any better explanation than that the *Castle*, momentous as its example proved, was mainly an accident of that half-understood devotion to "the Gothick," which was common at the time (1764), and of which Walpole as a dilettante, if not as a sincere disciple, was one of the chief English exponents. The story is a clumsy one, and its wonders are perpetually hovering on the verge of the burlesque. But its influence, though not immediate, was exceedingly great.

Walpole.

Its nearest successor, the *Old English Baron* of Clara Reeve in 1777, imitated rather Walpole's Gothicism than his ghostliness. Nor can the extremely remarkable and almost isolated novelette of *Vathek* (1783) be set down to Walpolian influence, though it undoubtedly did exemplify certain general tendencies of the day.

Its author, William Beckford, was the son of a rather prominent politician in the City of London, and inherited very great wealth. He travelled a good deal, leaving much later literary memorials of his travels; he collected books; he built two gorgeous palaces, one in England, at Fonthill in Wiltshire, and another in Portugal, at Cintra; and he in many respects was, and perhaps deliberately aimed at being, the ideal English "milord" of Continental fancy—rich, eccentric, morose, generous at times, and devoted to his own whimsical will. Such a character is generally contemptible in reality, but Beckford possessed very great intellectual ability, and *Vathek* stands alone. Its debts to the old Oriental tale are more apparent than real; those to the fantastic satirical romance of Voltaire, though larger, do not impair its main originality; and a singular gust is imparted to its picture of unbridled power and unlimited desire by the remembrance that the author himself was, in not such a very small way, the insatiable voluptuary he draws. The picture of the Hall of Eblis at the end has no superior in a certain slightly theatrical, but still real, kind of sombre magnificence, and the heroine Nouronihar is great. Beckford.

Mrs. Radcliffe (Anne Ward)—who was born in 1764, and did not die till 1822, but who published nothing after the beginning of the nineteenth century, though some work of hers appeared posthumously—produced in the course of a few years a series of elaborate and extremely popular work, which has not retained its vitality so well as has *Vathek*—*The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), the celebrated *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1795), and *The Italian* (1797). Mrs. Radcliffe is prodigal of the mysteries which figure in the title of her most famous work, of castles and forests, of secret passages and black veils; but her great peculiarity is the constant suggestion of supernatural interferences, which conscientious scruple, or eighteenth-century rationalism, or a mere sense of art, as constantly leads her to explain by natural causes. Mrs. Radcliffe.

Matthew Lewis, her successor, and (though he denied it) pretty certainly her imitator, had no such scruples, and in his notorious *Monk* and other stories and dramas simply lavished ghosts and demons. This department of the novel produced, unless *Vathek* be ranked in it, nothing of very high literary value, but its popularity was immense, and it probably did some real good by enlarging the sphere and quickening the fancy of the novelist. Lewis.

There are more than a few names of note who might be criticised if space permitted, and who must at any rate be mentioned. Henry Mackenzie (1745-1831), who followed Sterne in sentiment, though

not in other ways, drew floods of tears with *The Man of Feeling* (1771), *The Man of the World*, and *Julia de Roubigné;* the political philosopher Godwin, who will reappear, produced, besides his still famous *Caleb Williams* (1794), other novels, *St. Leon* (1799), *Fleetwood*, *Mandeville*, etc.; Holcroft the dramatist (1745-1809) gave *Alwyn*, *Hugh Trevor*, and especially *Anna St. Ives* (1792); Robert Bage, a freethinking Quaker and a man of business, wrote no less than six fictions, some of them of great length; Mrs. Inchbald (1753-1821), a beauty, an actress, a dramatist, and a novelist, gave to her *Simple Story* a certain charm; Hannah More (1745-1833), who was petted by Johnson in her youth, and petted the child Macaulay in her age, wrote *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, a moral novel not untinged with social satire. The *Zeluco* of Dr. John Moore (1719-1802) is not insignificant. But the most important, though far from the most gifted, novelist of the latter years of the century was Frances Burney (1752-1840), the daughter of a historian of music, who was the intimate friend of Johnson and most of the men of letters of his time, a pet of the great lexicographer and of the society of the Thrales, for some time a member of the household of Queen Charlotte, and then the wife of a French refugee. From him she took the name Madame D'Arblay, by which she is more commonly known as a diarist, though almost the whole of that delightful part of her work deals with her maiden years. Miss Burney wrote in *Evelina* (1778) a not very well-arranged but extremely lively picture of the entrance of a young girl into society; in *Cecilia* (1781) a much more ambitious and regular but less fresh story of love and family pride. Her later novels, *Camilla* (1796) and *The Wanderer* (1814), were, the former a partial, the latter a complete, failure. Her importance, however, consists in the fact that, at any rate in youth, she had a singular knack of catching the tone and manners of ordinary and usual society, and that by transferring these to her two first books she showed a way which all novelists have followed since. Her great predecessors of the middle of the century had not quite done this. Some of the stock ingredients of the older novel are indeed thrown in for Evelina's benefit—the discovery of parentage, the bold attempts of unscrupulous lovers, etc.—but they are of no real importance in the story, which draws its entire actual interest from the faithful presentation of the most possible, probable, and ordinary events and characters.

CHAPTER III

JOHNSON, GOLDSMITH, AND THE LATER ESSAYISTS

Writers-of-all-work—Johnson's life—His reputation—Work—And style—Goldsmith—His verse—His prose—Other essayists

THE establishment of the calling of man of letters as an irregular profession, and a regular means of livelihood, almost necessarily brought with it the devotion of the man of letters himself to any and every form of literature for which there was a public demand. Addison was enabled by his preferments to confine himself mainly to the essay—the new popular form of the time—and to the old popular form, the drama; and Pope's paternal means, with the profits of the Homer, in the same way enabled him to be nothing but a poet. But the more evil days of the central decades necessitated a greater distribution of talent. The essay, succeeded though not ousted by the novel, continued to be the most strictly popular form of writing. But the drama had not ceased to be the most easily profitable—a man might throughout the eighteenth century make three or four hundred pounds much more readily by dramatic writing than by any other kind. The poem, at least of the didactic class dear to the time, continued to be the most dignified—the novice who, as most novices generously do, aspired to the praise as well as the pay, must still attempt a poem. And lastly, there was an ever-widening demand for those kinds of writing which may be hack-work or something more, according to the abilities and dispositions of their executants—for translation, historical and miscellaneous compilation, popular science. It became, therefore, almost necessary on the one hand, and comparatively easy on the other, for the denizen of "Grub Street"—that partly real, partly imaginary, wholly debateable abode of the average author from somewhat before 1725 to considerably after 1775—to be everything by turns and nothing long. The most distinguished members by far of the class were Johnson and Goldsmith, and it has therefore seemed desirable to notice all their work together here. But since perhaps their best,

Writers-of-all-work.

and certainly their most congenial, work partook of the essay kind, they have been set at the head of the essayist class more particularly.

Johnson's life.

Samuel Johnson[1] was born at Lichfield on 18th September 1709. He was the son of a bookseller, and therefore had ample and early opportunity to become acquainted with books. And his education, though fitful, was sufficient. After private schooling, he was able to go to Pembroke College, Oxford, in his twentieth year, but his father, who, though of some position among his townsmen, had never been prosperous, died, and in 1731 Johnson, whose actual career at the University was spoilt by his poverty, had to leave without a degree. For a time he tried schoolmastering—the almost invariable refuge of the destitute with literary tendencies. But he had no degree, his temper was unaccommodating, and his strange physical defects—very bad sight, convulsive movements, and other scrofulous symptoms—were about the worst possible equipment for the task. In his six-and-twentieth year he married a widow some twenty years his senior (with a little money, but not for it, for he was dotingly fond of her), and set up a private academy. But it was not successful, and in 1737 he went to London with his pupil Garrick. Few details of his life for many years are known, for Boswell, his biographer later, could get at little. What is certain is that he suffered all the pangs and rebuffs of poverty; what is not quite so certain is whether his curious fitful indolence and his irritable temper had not more to do with this than sheer "inauspicious stars." Before coming to London he had translated Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia;* a year after he came he was a regular contributor to Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine*, for which, from 1740 to 1743, he wrote half-real, half-imaginary debates in Parliament. In 1738 he had attracted the attention of Pope by publishing *London*, an imitation of Juvenal, which he was far to surpass later by another of the same kind, the sad and splendid *Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749). In 1747 he planned, and persuaded the booksellers to adopt, the scheme of his famous *Dictionary*, which was completed in eight years, and for which he received fifteen hundred pounds, a sum not inconsiderable in itself, and large for the time, but naturally amounting to little more than starvation wages when the expenses were deducted, and the time of composition taken in. In 1750, having already, in ways not entirely comprehensible, attained a high literary reputation, he issued the *Rambler* in the revived *Spectator* vein, and when he had finished it his wife died, never to be forgotten. Later he followed the *Rambler* with the *Idler* (not separately published), and wrote, to pay the expenses of his

[1] The best complete edition of Johnson is that of the "Oxford Classics," published three-quarters of a century ago.

mother's funeral, the tale of *Rasselas* (1759), less a novel than a grave satire on human life. At last, in the new reign (1762), he received a pension of three hundred a year, which to him was wealth. The last twenty-two years of his life are better known, and were happier, owing to his friendship with the Thrales and Boswell, his clubs, and his position as literary dictator. But he wrote little, his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1774), an agreeable book, with one immortal passage, and his admirable *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) being the chief exceptions. His health, which had never been good, gave him some respite in early old age, but became worse again later, and after suffering from paralysis, dropsy, and asthma, he died on 13th December 1784, being buried in Westminster Abbey, and commemorated by a monument in St. Paul's.

His reputation.

During the later part of his lifetime Johnson was undoubtedly regarded as a sort of unofficial head of English literature, and also as a great philosopher and sage; while the reaction and oblivion which so often follow in such cases were prevented by the singular charms of Boswell's *Life* (see last chapter of this Book). But the Romantic school bitterly disliked Johnson's literary principles and practice, though not his political and religious theories, while these latter have become unpopular since. It has thus been usual during the greater part of the nineteenth century to extol Johnson's moral character, and feel or affect delight in his biography, while assigning him no high place as a writer. It is true that with the not quite certain exception of the *Lives of the Poets*, Johnson can claim no single work uniting bulk with value of matter and originality of form. His work in verse is very small, and though all of it is scholarly and some elegant, it is universally composed in obedience to a very narrow and jejune theory of English versification and English poetics generally.[1] Nothing perhaps but the beautiful epitaph on his friend Levett, and the magnificent statement of his religious pessimism in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, distinctly transcends mediocrity. His tragedy of *Irene* is a not very good example of an entirely artificial and lifeless kind. Although his essays have been oftener under- than over-valued of late, they are far from original in conception, and those at least of the *Rambler* are too often injured by the excessively stiff and cumbrous style which has been rather unjustly identified with Johnson's manner of writing generally. His *Dictionary*, though a wonderful monument of enterprise and labour, and though containing many acute and some witty definitions, is, as he well knew himself, but "drudgery," and his political pamphlets, though

Work.

[1] The poems on the Seasons are well worth study as instances of this. But it is fair to say that their authorship is not quite certain.

forcible and sensible, and his *Journey to the Hebrides*, though interesting, suffer also from "Johnsonese." His often beautiful prayers and meditations, his occasional work in inscriptions and the like, are, as well as the *Dictionary*, not easily classifiable literature, though, like that, they testify to the literary saturation of his mind and thought. *Rasselas*, an admirable though a mannered composition, and perhaps the chief document for Johnson's practical though melancholy wisdom, must always underlie the objection that it holds itself out as a story, but has really no story to tell, nor even (save in Imlac, who is partly Johnson) any character to bring out.

It is extremely fortunate that very late, and as it were accidentally, he was induced to leave an adequate and permanent monument of his powers in the *Lives of the Poets*. In these literary biographies, of which long before he had given an example in the *Life of Savage*, he practically struck into a new development of the essay—one to which Dryden had sometimes come near, and which he would have carried out with surpassing excellence had the time been ripe, but which had not been actually anticipated by any. It is no matter that Johnson's standards and view-points are extravagantly and exclusively of his time, so that occasionally—the cases of Milton and Gray are the chief—he falls into critical errors almost incomprehensible except from the historic side. Even these extravagances fix the critical creed of the day for us in an inestimable fashion, while in the great bulk of the Lives this criticism does no harm, being duly adjusted to the subjects. Johnson's estimate of Chaucer doubtless would have been, as his *Rambler* remarks on Spenser actually are, worthless, except as a curiosity. But of Dryden, of Pope, and of the numerous minor poets of their time and his, he could speak with a competently adjusted theory, with admirable literary knowledge and shrewdness, and with a huge store of literary tradition which his long and conversation-loving life had accumulated, and which would have been lost for us had he not written.

But it would be unjust to limit Johnson's literary value to this book, or even to this *plus The Vanity of Human Wishes*, *Rasselas*, and the best of his essays. It was far more extensive, and the above-referred-to Johnsonese, the "great-whale" style which Goldsmith so wittily reprehended, was only an exaggeration of its good influence. Of the alternate fashions of prose which we have already surveyed in some instances, and shall survey in more, the dangers are also alternate. The ornate and fanciful style tends to the florid and the extravagant, and needs to be restrained and tamed; the plain style tends to the slipshod and jejune, and needs to be raised and inspired. We have seen how, during the earlier prevalence of this latter, Addison and Swift came

And style.

to its rescue from the mere colloquialism which distinguishes writers like L'Estrange. So Johnson in its later came (as in different ways did Gibbon and Burke) to its rescue from the jejuneness and lack of colour which distinguish writers like Middleton.

His means may not have been perfect. His Latinising (not improbably helped by some early work of his on Sir Thomas Browne), his somewhat ponderous swing of balanced phrase, his too mechanical antithesis, lie open to much easy ridicule and to some just censure. But even his more pompous and rhetorical style has nobility and dignity, while the vigorous conversational directness which he always maintained in speech, and by no means neglected wholly in writing, served to preserve it from mere stilted bombast. And as this characteristic pervades all his prose work, all his prose work possesses, and to the true historic judgment will always retain, interest and value accordingly. As a poet he can only rely on a few trifles, playful or pathetic, and on the gorgeous declamation, rising to the level of true verse-eloquence, of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*.

Goldsmith.

Oliver Goldsmith—"Dr. Minor" to Johnson's "Dr. Major," a curious parallel, complement, and twin, almost as conventional in theory, but with wider and sweeter humanity, less massive in thought as in form, but more mobile, with less wisdom and conduct, but far more grace, fineness, and range—was born at or near Pallasmore, in County Longford, on 10th November 1728. The same neighbourhood, though not the same county, furnished the village of Lissoy, in West Meath, which has been identified as the suggesting, rather than the actual, scene of *The Deserted Village*. His father, a clergyman of the Church of Ireland (as was afterwards the brother to whom he dedicated *The Traveller*), was curate of both places. Oliver was educated at various schools and at Trinity College, Dublin, which, however, had not much better success with him as a student than it had had with Swift. He succeeded in taking his degree, but failed to qualify for orders, and after other failures went to Edinburgh to study physic. But after two years his restlessness sent him abroad, nominally to continue his studies at Leyden and Paris, really, it seems, to wander about the Continent, whence he returned with no money, some useful and stimulating experiences, and an exceedingly dubious degree of Bachelor of Medicine in the University of Louvain, or of Padua, or perhaps of Weissnichtwo, on the strength of which he was "Dr. Goldsmith" ever afterwards and sometimes attempted to practise. On his return he became an usher, a printer's reader, a reviewer, and hack to Griffiths the publisher.

At last, in 1759, he attracted some attention by his *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, an extraordinary

compound of good writing, bad taste, ignorance, mother-wit, and literary originality. He started *The Bee*, a short-lived periodical containing the earlier forms of some of his best essay-work, and wrote for divers others (it was in Newbery's *Public Ledger* that the "Chinese Letters," which became *The Citizen of the World*, first appeared). The exact date and origin of *The Vicar of Wakefield* form a curious bibliographical puzzle, for though not published till later, it had probably been finished by 1762. He also did, at all times of his life, a great amount of hackwork, at first anonymous and wretchedly paid, afterwards signed and very well rewarded, though his incurable thriftlessness always kept him in difficulties. *The Traveller*, which, small as it is, gave him a very high reputation, appeared in 1764; *The Vicar of Wakefield* two years later; and a third achievement in a third line, the comedy of *The Good-natured Man*, two years later still; while after a similar interval *The Deserted Village* ratified his poetical, and in three more *She Stoops to Conquer* his dramatic, position. He died in April 1774 of fever, much in debt and disturbed in mind, but beloved and lamented by all the best and greatest men of his day. His foibles were numerous. The odd contradictions of Goldsmith's mind and temper have been a favourite subject with biographers and essayists. Garrick's famous line—

He wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll—

seems to have been generally justified, though occasionally Goldsmith was more than a match for his society. His work—not merely his hack compilations—abounds in the most ludicrous blunders and evidences of ignorance; his critical faculties were utterly haphazard. As for moral traits, though the idleness of his youth certainly did not characterise his manhood, and though there is not much proof that after he became industrious he was, as he certainly was earlier, a gambler, he had none of the prudential virtues. With an income probably at least three times as large as Johnson's ever was, he died two thousand pounds in debt. But much of this seems to have been due to his generosity to others—a quality which, with his general kindliness of heart, has never been denied. And in literature he was, as Johnson himself emphatically said, "a very great man." His plays had best be left to give some savour and substance to that chapter on eighteenth-century drama, which, but for him and for Sheridan, would be indeed a thin thing; the rest of his work may be noticed here.

The poetical part is surprisingly small in bulk, but full of quality, though not always of strictly poetical quality. It consists of *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*, each of rather more than

400 lines; of the pretty but not very strong ballad of *The Hermit*, better known as "Edwin and Angelina"; of the two capital light poems in swinging anapæst, *The Haunch of Venison* and *Retaliation;* of a quite unimportant Oratorio; and of a few pages of miscellaneous verse, the best things of which are the quaint *jeu d'esprit*, "The Description of an Author's Bed-chamber," "The Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog," the famous Stanzas on Woman—"When lovely woman stoops to folly," the pathetic-humorous epitaph on Ned Purdon, and the sardonic elegy on Mrs. Mary Blaize. This latter division, especially with the brilliant *Retaliation*, a string of consummate repartees on his mentors of the Club (*except* Johnson), displays, with the additional zest of verse, the qualities which we shall note more fully in Goldsmith's prose. His two serious and, so to speak, "full-dress" poems are a curious contrast. It is certain that they enjoyed the benefit of Johnson's criticism, and not improbable that they underwent rehandling from him; and they show not merely that rigid adherence to the older couplet as vehicle which he preferred, but a great similarity to his general ways of thought. They excel the *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* as much in grace, variety, and sense of nature as they fall short of the *Vanity* in grandeur and force; but they are not in their own fashion devoid either of force or of grandeur. They were the last really great work of the artificial-conventional school of verse, and not far from its greatest.

His verse.

In prose-writing, when he did not endeavour to be critical of literature, Goldsmith was exposed to few disadvantages by his time and school, and he brought extraordinary gifts of his own. In the first place, he could be almost as sentimental as Sterne and even more pathetic, without Sterne's approaches either to the maudlin or the grotesque. In the second place, he had a quite miraculous gift of seizing, in the re-creative fashion, touches and traits in humanity—a gift shared by no one else in his century save Fielding, and of a kind quite different from Fielding's. Lastly, and for the purposes of literature most important of all, he had the gift of an altogether charming style, which is impossible to analyse and very difficult even to describe vaguely; so that it has never been successfully imitated, though Thackeray has, by a different route, sometimes reached very similar effects.

His prose.

Goldsmith put a little of this style in his merest hack compilations, but he used it to the best effect partly in scattered essay productions loosely following the *Spectator* model, partly in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and partly in the book called *The Citizen of the World*. The ostensible scheme of this last follows Montesquieu and many others so as to satirise English society by representing it as it appears to an Oriental. This scheme as such was a little stale; it had been

used again and again from Tom Brown downwards, nor were Goldsmith's powers of philosophic reflection or of social satire exactly those required for it. But in his hands it served as the opportunity for the creation and working out of the most delightfully live figures, of whom the shabby Beau Tibbs is only the most famous and hardly the best. Perhaps his most wonderful thing is the "Reverie at the Boar's Head," which, though some of it is cut-and-dried political or religious polemic, is unique in the work of the eighteenth century outside Swift, and possesses an easy lambent light of fancy which the fierce blaze of Swift's genius rarely allowed him to give.

It was in the handling of the Essay—for all his important prose work really belongs to this class, even the *Vicar* having strong inclinations thereto—that Goldsmith's greatest importance in the history of English prose literature consists. Johnson had not carried the scheme or scope of his *Ramblers* and *Idlers* much, if at all, beyond the Steele-Addison model; and though the contemporary revivers of this, who will presently be noticed, modernised the subjects a little, they did not much alter the style. But Goldsmith holds out a hand to Leigh Hunt on one side as he does to Steele on the other in point of selection of subjects and mode of treatment; while he far excels both in that quintessential quality of style which is of more supreme importance in the Essay than anywhere else. The greatest of all miscellaneous writers on the lighter side in the eighteenth century, as Johnson is the greatest of its miscellaneous writers on the more serious—this is a title which Goldsmith cannot be grudged or denied; and when it is remembered that he was also one of its best tale-tellers, the best, with only one possible rival, of its dramatists, and one of the most noteworthy of its poets, Johnson's verdict will hardly be thought undeserved.

The *Rambler* and at least the earlier essays of Goldsmith were part of a second blossoming of the periodical or occasional essay, which appeared about the middle of the century, and continued with intervals to the very eve of the appearance of the new reviews and magazines of the modern kind. There had indeed been things of the sort in the thirty years between the last attempts of Addison and Steele and the first of Johnson, but they had had little or no interest save such as is derived from the already mentioned fact that Fielding had a hand in some of them.

Other essayists.

The most noticeable except the *Rambler* and the *Adventurer* (a sort of imitation *Rambler*, edited by Hawkesworth, the great ape of Johnson, and contributed to by Johnson himself) was the *World*, which appeared between 1753 and 1756. This is noteworthy, because an attempt was made to make it a distinct "journal of

society." The editor, Edward Moore, was a man of letters of some ability, who played the main part of "Adam FitzAdam"—the *eidolon* who, according to the etiquette of the scheme, was supposed to produce the paper—very fairly. Its interest for us consists in the fact that among the contributors were some of the very chief of those men of fashion, Chesterfield, Horace Walpole, Soame Jenyns, Hanbury Williams, who at the time affected literature. It was in the *World*, for instance, that Chesterfield's well-meant, and in recent days rather unfairly treated, attempt to do a good turn to Johnson's *Dictionary* appeared, and drew from the nettled lexicographer the famous letter, which, though a magnificent piece of English, is not perhaps as magnanimous, or even as just, as it is magnificent. Soon after the *World* appeared, with a less brilliant staff, but still written "by gentlemen for gentlemen," the *Connoisseur* of Colman the Elder and Bonnel Thornton, where the *eidolon* was "Mr. Town," and where Cowper produced the few examples of literature that we have from him before his terrible ailment and his long abstinence from writing. Another long gap, with nothing of importance except (and this is of very great importance) the work of Goldsmith, brings us to the two interesting periodicals, the *Mirror* (1779-80) and the *Lounger* (1785-87), issued at Edinburgh, not in London, by Henry Mackenzie, the "Man of Feeling" (*vide supra*), and a knot of Scottish wits, lawyers, and *literati* generally. These periodicals give the usual direct and indirect information on costume, the manners of society, and the like, some vivid sketches of the Pitt and Fox struggle, some valuable literary criticism (Mackenzie's review of Burns, for instance), some interesting details about "nabobs," and, above all, numerous evidences of the growing taste for the picturesque.

In the very last attempts to carry out the *Spectator* tradition, that have attained a sort of shelter from oblivion in the cavern of the *British Essayists*,[1] the *Observer* of Cumberland, and the *Looker On* of a clergyman named Roberts, there is little of interest except the proof that the form was really dead, though two respectable persons were trying to galvanise it. The actual Essay was before many years were over to break fresh ground in every direction, and with the novel to become the distinguishing form of the literature of the nineteenth century. But in this particular shape it had done its work.

[1] It has been thought sufficient to confine notice here to the contents of the standard collection of *British Essayists* by Chalmers (45 vols. 1808), though it does not contain even the last and minor essays of Steele and Addison, or those of Fielding, much less the numerous attempts of less famous persons in the kind throughout the century.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRAVER PROSE

Lateness of history in English — Hume — Robertson — Minors — Gibbon — The *Autobiography*—*The Decline and Fall*—His style—Burke—His rhetorical supremacy—Qualities of his style and method—Theology and philosophy—Warburton—Paley—Adam Smith—Godwin—His importance and position.

ALTHOUGH the separation of this chapter from the last may seem questionable, inasmuch as most things that Johnson at least wrote were grave, and as Goldsmith wrote copiously what he at least called history, there is sufficient justification for it in the fact that the Essay always and properly tends to lightness, to popular treatment, and that the historical school of the time is sufficiently important to have the principal place in a chapter which may also have other constituents. We may pass from it, taking the great figure of Burke as a point of junction, through writers on political philosophy to those on philosophy proper, and may also include the (for us and at this time) less important section of theology.

Lateness of history in English.

The development of historical writing, as apart from mere chronicling, is necessarily somewhat late, but it was later in England than in any other country. At the close of the seventeenth century Raleigh, Knolles, and Clarendon stood practically alone in English literature (nor was Clarendon yet printed) as historians who united bulk of work to historical sense and merit of literary style. Even of these Raleigh is chiefly qualified by the beauty of his purple patches. Nor for some time after the beginning of the eighteenth century itself was there much improvement. But towards the middle of it remarkable changes were made by two Scottish scholars, Hume and Robertson, while towards the end the greatest historian in every sense that England has yet seen arose in Gibbon.

David Hume belongs to this chapter by a double title as philosopher and as historian, while he might almost have appeared in the last as essayist. He was born at Edinburgh in 1711, his father

being of the Border clan of Home or Hume, and a Berwickshire laird; but David was not the eldest son. He went to the University of his native town, tried law, tried commerce in England, but liked neither, and had just sufficient means to enable him to fall back on private study. It was after a visit to France that he published (in 1739) his remarkable *Treatise of Human Nature*, and he followed it up two or three years later with *Essays Moral and Political*. But he still had no fixed employment, and for some years he tried tutorships, secretaryships, and the like. He competed in vain for more than one professorship in the Scottish Universities, but was appointed Keeper of the Advocates' Library. Before this he had published (1748) an *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* and (1751) an *Enquiry into the Principles of Morals*. These later books were in some sort refashionings of the earlier. It was not till 1754 that he began his celebrated *History of England* in the middle by a volume on the two first Stuarts, which he afterwards extended forward to the Revolution and backward to the beginnings. The whole took eight years to finish. He also published *Dissertations* in 1762, and some posthumous work has to be added. His later years were as prosperous as his earlier had been uncertain. In 1763 he was made Secretary of Legation in Paris, where he was quite at home, and three years later he became Under Secretary for the Home Department. He died in Edinburgh (1776). Hume was an amiable and friendly person, with some slight foibles of vanity and epicureanism. His religious scepticism, which was at least as much a fashion of his time as it was necessarily connected with his philosophical views, does not directly concern us here.

Hume.

This sceptical tendency, however, applied in other directions, made him very important in philosophy and history, while his gifts of expression as applied to these two subjects made him at least equally important in literature. In philosophy he applied his criticism to the furthering of the Lockian system, not in the idealist-constructive direction of Berkeley, but in an almost wholly destructive way, abolishing the connection of cause and effect in favour of mere sequence, substituting a bare chain of thoughts for an independently thinking mind, and reducing everything to sensation; in history he applied himself to the dissolution of the Whig myths. His philosophical importance has lasted better than his historical, because his history, though full of ability, was written without access to many documents since laid open, and with a somewhat insufficient attention to careful use of those that were accessible; while his philosophy, needing nothing but the furniture of his own mind, and employing that in the best way on one side of perennially interesting and insoluble questions, remains a *point de repère* for ever. It is

indeed admitted to have practically restarted all philosophical inquiry, being as much the origin of German and other theory as of the Scottish school and of later English negative materialism. Luckily, too, the value of literary work as such is far more enduring than that of either philosophy or history by themselves. For they may be superseded, but it never can. And Hume's expression was for his special purposes supreme—perfectly clear, ironical, but not to the point of suspicious frivolity, and as polished as the somewhat dead and flat colour of the style of the time would admit.

Robertson.

William Robertson, a man of less original mental force than Hume, but nearly as good a writer, and a more careful historian, was born at Borthwick in Midlothian on 19th September 1721. His father was a minister, and he himself, after school and university education at Dalkeith and Edinburgh, became one. At about the age of thirty he became conspicuous in the General Assembly as leader of the "Moderate" or Latitudinarian party. And in 1759 he became joint minister of Greyfriars' in Edinburgh; his amicable differences with his Evangelical colleague Dr. Erskine are commemorated in *Guy Mannering*. He had just, in the winter of 1758-59, published his *History of Scotland* with very great success, and in consequence of it he became chaplain to the King in 1761, Principal of the University a year later, and Historiographer-Royal in 1764. His second great work, ten years later than his first, was his *History of the Reign of Charles V.*, which brought him in a very large sum of money. He issued a third, the *History of America*, in 1777, and a *Disquisition on the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* in 1791. Two years later he died. Robertson was a very popular man—even Johnson loved him, in spite of what might seem the three fatal defects of Scottish nationality, Whig politics, and Latitudinarian religion—but his personal popularity had no unfair influence on his historical successes. His style is, in the merely correct, but not merely jejune, kind, singularly good; his conception of history, though not answering to that of more modern times, and tinged with the idiosyncrasies of his age, is philosophical and shrewd; and above all, he had, what modern historians, with all their pretensions and all their equipment, have too often lacked, a thorough sense of rhetorical fitness in the good, not the empty, sense, and could make his histories definite works of art and definite logical presentments of a view. Nor was he by any means careless of research according to his own standard, which was already a severer one than that of Hume.

A great deal of history was written in the third quarter of the century, most of which has in due course become waste-paper. The most characteristic specimens of this are naturally to be found

in the historical work of Goldsmith and Smollett. The qualifications, however, of neither were those of the historian proper. Both were writing rapidly as hacks; and there is perhaps no department of literature which is so impatient of hack-work as history. But though neither had anything like the requisite knowledge, or gave anything like the requisite time and pains to his work, both had attractiveness. Goldsmith's exquisite style and singular instinctive knowledge of humanity, Smollett's faculty of narrative, and his strong, though not always impartial, sense, took their work out of the merely ephemeral as literature, though perhaps without giving it the qualities or the dignity of history. Of the numerous and sometimes not unnoteworthy writers of their own class and beneath them—the Psalmanazars, the John Campbells, and the rest—it is impossible to write here.

Minors.

But they helped the vogue of history, and so may have given a little impetus to the greatest historical book of the century, if not of all time, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Edward Gibbon was born at Putney in the spring of 1737, of a good and rather wealthy family. He was a very sickly child (indeed, he never had very good health), and seems to have been as unhappy as Cowper during his two years at Westminster. Nor was his stay at Magdalen College, Oxford, more fortunate. He went up too young (in April 1752), disliked the place and the college, and took into his head to profess himself converted to Roman Catholicism. After an interval his father sent him to Switzerland to be reconverted by a Protestant minister at Lausanne, M. Pavillard, whose endeavours were crowned by the rather dubious success that Gibbon on Christmas Day "received the sacrament with Protestant rites, and suspended his religious inquiries." The tone of his subsequent work would seem to indicate that the pendulum remained in an abnormal deflection from the perpendicular. He remained, however, at Lausanne for some five years, reading much, as well as falling in love, and, at his father's command, out of it, with Mlle. Suzanne Curchod, the future Madame Necker, and mother of Madame de Staël, to whom she did not transmit her own delicate beauty. Gibbon returned to England in 1758, writing French nearly as well as English, and with strong but indefinite literary aspirations. He served in the militia for some years and then again went abroad, finally conceiving, as he has told in one of the magical sentences of his autobiography, the definite idea of his great work on the 15th of October 1764. But he was in no hurry, and twelve years of residence in Switzerland and at home, of business anxieties after his father's death, of silent membership of Parliament, and, for a time, of tenure of office as a Commissioner of Trade and Plantations, passed before

Gibbon.

the first volume appeared in February 1776. Another twelve, great part of which was passed in Switzerland, saw the completion, the actual moment of which he has recorded in as stately a fashion as that accorded to its beginning. In 1794 he died in London.

Gibbon's miscellaneous work, both in English and French, is not inconsiderable, and it displays his peculiar characteristics; but the only piece of distinct literary importance is his *Autobiography*. This, upon which he seems to have amused himself by spending much pains, was left unsettled for press. Edited with singular judgment and success under the care of his intimate friend and literary executor Lord Sheffield, it has been for three generations one of the favourite things of its kind with all good judges; and is likely to continue so in the *textus receptus*, for which the fussy fidelity of modern literary methods will probably try in vain to substitute a chaos of rough drafts.

The Autobiography.

Even this, however, is a mere *hors d'œuvre* and kickshaw in comparison with the great History. According to the severest and most exacting conception of what history should be, it should satisfy three conditions. In the first place, the author should have thoroughly studied and intelligently comprehended all the accessible and important documents on the subject. In the second, he should have so digested and ordered his information that not merely a congeries of details, but a regular structure of history, informed and governed throughout by a philosophical idea, should be the result. In the third, this result should, from the literary as well as the historical side, be an organic whole composed in orderly fashion and manifesting a distinct and meritorious style. It was in the first of these requisites, and to some extent in the second, that Gibbon's forerunners, including Robertson and Hume, had been chiefly deficient; it is in the second, and to some extent in the third, that his successors of the modern historical school have fallen short.

The Decline and Fall.

In the first two points, by common consent of all the competent, Gibbon attains an excellence which, when his time and circumstances are considered, is simply marvellous, and which does not lose much of its wonder even when the proviso is withdrawn. The unceasing rummage of a hundred years has added, of course, much in bulk to the mass of his information, but it has added much less in substance. For, on the one hand, Gibbon had the gift of understanding the true sense of all that he read; and on the other, the gift of divining much that he could not or did not read. But his faculty of getting at individual truths is of less importance than his faculty of historical "architectonic," his grasp of the historic sense. Almost his only drawback in this respect lay in the peculiarity of which he was

probably, as men usually are of their weaknesses, most proud—his attitude of sceptical belittlement towards Christianity in particular, though not much more to Christianity than to all forms of "enthusiastic" religion. For, though he was far too acute a thinker and too much of a born historian not to see how great a part forces derived from this source had played, he was bound, on his own principles, to regard these results as merely due to folly and vanity, to something negative and false—a most unphilosophical theory, which Carlyle has executed in one of his greatest sentences about another matter. But Gibbon had no other fault as a historian (though as a man this lack of enthusiasm, and of comprehension of it, seems to have led him into some vanities and meannesses) than this, and even this was not fatal.

Of his greatness as a man of letters there should have been even less doubt; but it has not been invariably acknowledged. The strong reaction of early Romanticism involved him in the dislike with which it regarded all its more immediate predecessors of the eighteenth century; and Coleridge, who gave the tone to all English criticism for many years, was particularly unjust to Gibbon's style. Even his own day was half-puzzled and half-repelled by the gorgeousness of it, just as the succeeding age was by its extreme stateliness and want of alert variety. For Gibbon, like Johnson, of whom we have spoken, and Burke, of whom we are to speak, was a most prominent representative of the attempt once more to rescue the plain style from its own plainness, to give it ornament, while not relaxing its general laws of almost compulsory balance and of a certain consecrated phraseology. He attained this effect, not like the one by a heavily classicised vocabulary and by exaggerated antithesis, nor like the other by accumulations of simile and metaphor and epexegetic statement. He was indeed not very unlike either, though he far surpassed both, in adorning his writing with set pieces of description; but the most characteristic part of his style does not lie in these. It lies mainly in a peculiar roll of sentence, conducted throughout with a wavelike movement, and ending with a sound so arranged as to echo over the interval of sense and breath, till the next is well on its way. That this should be achieved without monotony is almost inconceivable; and Gibbon has been accused of this fault, but not with much justice. Of his minor devices, the chief is a peculiar adaptation of the taste of the age for periphrases, which at once gives a more sounding phrase and suggests interesting associations to the mind. Constantius for him is "the son of Constantine," the rostrum is "the tribunal which Cicero had so often ascended"—a device much, and too often with disastrous consequences, imitated since, but in him of admirable effect.

His style.

The transition from Gibbon to Burke is interesting and not fortuitous. They were not merely contemporaries, but (though hardly friends) members of the same society; nor is it a mere accident that Burke was instrumental, by his financial reforms, in depriving Gibbon of his comfortable sinecure. They were the two Englishmen of their century who wrote the most gorgeous English, and the two men of their century (with Vico and Montesquieu) who had most sense of historical continuity, of that philosophic union of all times and countries, one aspect of which Burke has celebrated in brilliant words. But personally there could hardly be a greater unlikeness between any two men than between Gibbon's sluggish nature, his intense self-centredness, not to say selfishness, his limited tastes and interests, and the enthusiastic many-sidedness and impulsiveness of Burke. He was born at Dublin in 1729, and was educated in Ireland, graduating at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1748. He then went to London, exactly at the middle of the century, and kept terms at the Middle Temple, but was never called. We do not know much about his early manhood, but in the year 1756 he published two small but very notable treatises, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (following the style but ironically rebutting the argument of Bolingbroke) and *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, the first, and for a long time the only, important and original æsthetic essay in English. In this same year he married, and three years later he planned the well-known *Annual Register*, to which for the greater part of his life he was the largest contributor. He became private secretary, first to Gerard Hamilton, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, and then in 1765 to the Marquis of Rockingham.

Burke.

As this latter was Prime Minister, Burke was at once returned to Parliament, and continued till his death to make a very important, though a rather curious, figure in the State. For many years he was a strong Whig partisan, and, regarding the Tories as having caused the American Revolution, supported this in fact (though he affected to deplore it) as strongly as he afterwards opposed the French. His speeches were never very effective as delivered, but they had a great effect when printed, and he constantly, at all times of his life, seconded them by pamphlets which are almost undistinguishable from the speeches themselves in kind. The first of these to attract great attention was the *Observations on the Present State of the Nation*, in 1769; but its follower, next year, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, was superior, and still ranks among the very best of the class of writings in which admirable literary quality and great intellectual force are put at the service of party. After representing Wendover for nearly ten years, he sat for

Bristol during six more, and many of his most important speeches and tracts were addressed to this constituency. Afterwards, losing Bristol owing to his support of Roman Catholic claims, he sat for Malton. When the North ministry at last fell, Burke was Paymaster of the Forces, in 1782-83; he never held any other office. Opinions differ as to the reason which made him, in 1788, join, and indeed head, the crusade against Warren Hastings; but this, whatever may be thought of it, gave splendid openings for his rhetoric. And the almost immediate outbreak of the French Revolution at last supplied his true subject. Although he had sometimes been led astray by party, Burke's sympathies were always with order, humanity, the distribution to every class in the state, and not to one only, be it highest or lowest, of its fair rights, and above all, that continuity of institutions and of historical development which has been glanced at above. The riot, the bloodshed, the gross unfairness to classes, however unfairly privileged before, and above all, the mischievous and impossible breach with the whole history of the French nation, stimulated him not merely to the most strenuous action in Parliament, but to the publication of a series of works which, for combined literary merit and political effect, stand alone. The series began with the famous *Reflections on the French Revolution* in 1790, and it was continued by *A Letter to a Noble Lord* (1790), *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), *Thoughts on French Affairs*, and the great *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, where in some cases no doubt Burke's passionate feeling and his wonderful command of language, not quite sufficiently restrained by a sense of humour, led him to exaggeration and bad taste, but which in the main are magnificent examples of his passionate love of justice and freedom. He died in 1797. Burke's amiable, though both excitable and irritable, character and temper, his various conversational ability, and his other personal qualities, are well known from Boswell's *Johnson*, Miss Burney's *Diary*, and other famous biographies and memoirs of the period. His work—though some of it excites the dislike of partisans in one way and some in the other—has, for this very reason, never wanted admirers of either party, while the fortunate impartiality of literature can admire the whole.

His rhetorical supremacy.

The style of Burke is necessarily to be considered throughout as conditioned by oratory. For the last thirty years of his life this was inevitable; and though in his earlier days he had not the same constant practice in speaking, his undoubted selection of Bolingbroke as model predisposed him in the same way. In other words, he was first of all a rhetorician,[1] and

[1] Using rhetoric in its best modern general sense as "the art of prose literature," but with the ancient specialising addition, "applied to the purpose of suasion."

probably the greatest that modern times have ever produced. But his rhetoric always inclined much more to the written than to the spoken form, with results annoying perhaps to him at the time, but even to him satisfactory afterwards, and an inestimable gain to the world. The ordinary orator's and debater's work, if preserved at all, constantly loses value: there is no danger of Burke being forgotten while English literature exists. In the *Vindication* (which is better Bolingbroke than Bolingbroke himself) the sentences are as a rule short and crisp, arranged within succinct antithetic parallels, which seldom exceed a single pair of clauses. In the *Sublime and Beautiful* long and short sentences are more mixed, and there is even a distinct tendency to the former. And in this treatise we perceive, though not yet in anything like full development, the genuine properties of Burke's own style, which henceforward become more and more apparent.

Qualities of his style and method.

The most important of these, in so far as it is possible to enumerate them here, are as follows. First of all, and most distinctive, so much so as to have escaped no competent critic, is a very curious and, until his example made it imitable, nearly unique faculty of *building up* an argument or a picture by a succession of complementary strokes, not added at haphazard, but growing out of and on to one another. No one has ever been such a master as was Burke of the best and grandest kind of the figure called, in the technical language of rhetoric, Amplification, and this, which in ordinary hands often, if not always, leads to tedious verbiage, is the direct implement by which he achieves his greatest effects.

In the work which succeeds his entrance into political life, fresh devices of *ordonnance* appear, and the *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* presents them in very interesting exhibition. The piece may be said to consist of a certain number of specially laboured paragraphs, in which the arguments or pictures just spoken of are put as forcibly as the author can put them, and, as a rule, in a succession of shortish sentences, built up and glued together with the strength and flexibility of a newly-fashioned fishing-rod. In the intervals the texts thus given are turned about, commented on, justified, or discussed in detail, in a rhetoric for the most part, though not always, rather less serried, less evidently burnished, and in less full dress. And this general arrangement proceeds through the rest of his works, with, in the latest and most brilliant (those on the French Revolution), a less orderly arrangement, compensated by a greater rush of thought and rhetoric.

In his ornaments, whether of idea or of imagery, Burke is better worth studying than almost any other English writer. In simile and

trope generally, he is, though often wonderfully brilliant, distinctly uncertain, quite untrustworthy in the direction of humour, and in some of his more forcible images apt even to be positively disgusting. On the other hand, his grandeur seldom falls into the grandiose, and the magical effect of more imaginative passages (of which the famous one about Marie Antoinette is only the stock example) has never been exceeded in political writing. Epigram he can occasionally manage with great effect, but it is not by any means so specially and definitely his weapon as imaginative argument, and the marshalling of vast masses of complicated detail into properly rhetorical battalions or (to alter the image) mosaic pictures of enduring beauty. The equally famous sentence-picture, in the *Letter to a Noble Lord*, of Windsor Castle, "girt with the double belt of its kindred and coeval towers," is an instance, not excelled by any sentence in all the literatures from Greek to English, of words so used as to get out of them the very last possibility, the full triple effect—first of mere beauty of sound; secondly, of conveying with the utmost force the immediate meaning and image intended; and thirdly, of urging the intended argumentative application, not more by the general conduct of the sentence than by the very ornaments and accessories of the phrase. Only a great imagination would have been seized with this use of the inner and outer bailey and the keep of a Gothic fortress; only a consummate faculty of expression could have so arranged it as at once to make a perfect harmonic chord, a complete visual picture, and a forcible argument. The minor rhetoric, the suasive purpose, must be kept in view; if it be left out the thing loses, and this is one of the points in which Burke is far below Browne, who has no need of purpose. But he is the king of his own business-like century in point of prose.

Theology and philosophy proper provide us with lesser, though in some cases by no means little, men. The former, indeed, contrasts very remarkably and unfortunately, as literature, with the work of the preceding age. The Sherlocks in one half of the century, and Samuel Horsley (1733-1806) in the other half, have a certain traditional reputation, sustained occasionally by praise from those who have perhaps no very wide acquaintance with the profane authors of the period. The Deist controversy produced, chiefly from the ranks of the Nonjurors, who included a disproportionate number of the most learned and able of the English clergy, some great controversialists, notably the redoubtable polemic Charles Leslie and the by no means unpractical mystic William Law. In Nonconformity and its fringes, the Wesleys and Doddridge were greater men at verse than at literary prose. Warburton earlier and Paley later may almost suffice for more

Theology and philosophy.

detailed mention in this particular branch. So too the philosophers of the older kinds—Reid, Brown, Stewart—give little that is literature after Berkeley and Hume, and in the newer sorts Adam Smith and Godwin may do duty as samples. For though no literary contempt is more unliterary than that so long and so widely entertained for the eighteenth century, this century does display a certain want of individual difference in the *form* of its writers. Their thought is often highly original, and their application of literary treatment still more so. But the qualities, for instance, which earned a place in literature for Sir William Blackstone (1723-80) and for Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-92), men born in the same year with Adam Smith, were really literary. It is not for nothing, even from the mere bookish point of view, but of right as a man of letters, that Blackstone sits enthroned in the vast library of All Souls College. Yet the main interest of his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765, *sq.*) for us, like the main interest of Sir Joshua's presidential *Discourses* to the Royal Academy, lies in the application of a literary common form, at once easy and stately, to technical subjects. Earlier such subjects, if treated at all, would have been treated more probably in Latin; later experience makes it scarcely unjust to say that increase in technical precision has not always or often been accompanied, in the sciences at least, if not in the arts, by increase of literary quality. But still all eighteenth-century writers have a certain community, and must be dealt with representatively.

Warburton.

William Warburton was a rather typical divine of the age, who, after perhaps occupying too high a position in it, has been unduly depreciated in this. He was an older man than most who have been mentioned in this chapter, and was born at Newark in 1698. He went to no university, and at first adopted law as a profession, but was ordained in 1723. His famous *Divine Legation of Moses*, which would have been one of the most brilliant paradoxes in literature if the author had kept it down in size, and one of the most learned of works if he had attended a little more to accuracy, began to appear in 1738. Henceforward the prosperity of Warburton, who was accused by his numerous enemies of being as sycophantic in private relations as he was rough and rude in public controversy, was unbroken. An odd friendship with Pope gave him prominence in the world of *belles lettres*, his marriage with Gertrude Tucker, niece of Allen of Prior Park (the Allworthy of Fielding), supplied money, and a steady tide of professional advancement landed him in the bishopric of Gloucester, which he held for twenty years, dying in 1779. Warburton just came short of being a great theologian and a great man of letters. His con-

troversial manners cannot be defended, but we should probably have heard a good deal less of them if he had been on the unorthodox side.

Paley.

Something of the same character, with less arrogance, appears in William Paley, who was born at Peterborough in 1743, was educated at Giggleswick School and Christ's College, Cambridge, was Senior Wrangler in 1763, obtained a Fellowship, and then a succession of preferments in the Church. He died Archdeacon of Carlisle and Rector of Bishop Wearmouth in 1805. His *Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), his *Horae Paulinae* (1790), his *Evidences of Christianity* (1794), and his *Natural Theology* (1802), at once attained, long kept, and have by no means wholly lost, a great reputation. As an apologist and expositor, Paley has been accused of a too business-like and profit-and-loss view of religion; but those who call him interested perhaps use an unfair presumption, and his popularity has no doubt suffered from his having served for generations as a pass-textbook in the University of Cambridge. As a philosopher in things divine and human, he has a little too much of the merely forensic competence of the advocate about him. But this same competence extends (it may be not in the most interesting manner) to his work as literature. Paley gets the full value out of the plain style, for purposes to which it is far better adapted than anything more imaginative could possibly be. His arguments, if far lower and less noble, are much more easily intelligible than Butler's; his style is perfectly clear; he sees his point and his method distinctly, and seldom or never fails to prove the one to the best of the other.

Adam Smith.

Adam Smith, the first great political economist in English, and almost the founder of the study of that subject as understood in modern times, was born at Kirkcaldy in June 1723, and was thoroughly educated at his native place, Glasgow, and Oxford, where he went as Snell Exhibitioner to Balliol. He was an only and a posthumous child, and read quietly at home or in Edinburgh till, in 1751, he was elected to the Glasgow Chair of Logic, from which he passed to that of Moral Philosophy. His *Theory of Moral Sentiments* appeared in 1759, the *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* not till seventeen years later, in 1776, the year of the death of Hume, Smith's greatest friend, and it would seem the greatest influence upon him. Smith lived in London for a time, and later at Edinburgh, where he had a Commissionership of Customs. He died in 1790. The far-reaching consequences of Smith's theories as to free trade do not here concern us; it is sufficient that he possessed, and applied to two great subjects in not much short of perfection, that clear, rather

colourless and passionless, but admirably business-like as well as artist-like, style which is the glory of the eighteenth century.

There are others whom one would fain discuss, such as Abraham Tucker (1705-74), the author of the voluminous but fascinating *Light of Nature Pursued* (1765), a huge storehouse of thought that is not seldom original, put with constant vividness and much humour, though diffusely and without order. And the vulgar vigour of Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a great influence directly on popular thought, and a greater through his disciple Cobbett, must at least be mentioned. But we can give space to but one more name.

William Godwin, the author of *Political Justice*, was born at Wisbeach in 1756, and spent most of his earlier years in the eastern counties. He was for a time a Nonconformist minister, but drifted from Christianity, took to literature, and did a great deal of early hackwork, much of it unidentified, and none of it now read. It was in 1793 that the *Inquiry concerning Political Justice* appeared, and the author only escaped prosecution (which befell not a few of his friends of less anarchic principles) because it was (no doubt wisely) judged that a very large and expensive book, written in a style not in the least likely to appeal to the vulgar, was not dangerous. Next year appeared *Caleb Williams*, in which some of the doctrines of *Political Justice* received illustration, but which attained great popularity, and has never lost some. In 1797 Godwin married Mary Wollstonecraft, herself a "she-philosopher," who died soon afterwards. He lived nearly forty years longer, marrying again, becoming Shelley's father-in-law, publishing, bookselling, and writing continually, but always an unprosperous man. He received a sinecure office when his Radical friends came into power after the first Reform Bill, and died in April 1836.

Godwin.

Godwin is by far the most important instance, for the last quarter of the century, of the man-of-letters-of-all-work approaching, but not yet fully enlisted in, actual journalism, of whom we find the first and greatest example in Dryden, and, during the middle of the eighteenth century itself, remarkable instances in Johnson and Goldsmith. He is also almost the last who does not avail himself, or avails himself only to a small extent, of the newspaper to spread his views; and in this he differs from his contemporary Cobbett, who for this reason will not be noticed till the next Book. Godwin is essentially a prose-writer, and his style, though it has been over-praised, is of considerable merit. Although his exaggerated anarchism and determination to regard everything as an open question are absurd enough in principle and lead to the most unimaginable absurdities in detail, yet they give his thought always the appearance, and sometimes the reality, of

His importance and position.

freer play than had been enjoyed by any English writer since Hobbes. His novels have been more than once referred to. His philosophical and critical writings are chiefly contained in the *Political Justice* (which he altered and made much tamer in subsequent editions), in the somewhat later *Enquirer*, a very interesting collection of essays, and in a second collection, published towards the extreme end of his life, called *Thoughts on Man.*

His drama of *Antonio*, which produced an exquisitely characteristic piece from his friend Charles Lamb, has no merit, and his historical and biographical works, *History of the Commonwealth*, *Life of Chaucer*, *Lives of the Necromancers*, are compilations, though, at least in the first case, compilations much above the average. It was Godwin, more than any one else, who introduced the mischievous but popular practice of bolstering out history by describing at great length the places and scenes which his heroes might have seen, the transactions in which, being contemporary, they might have taken an interest, and the persons with whom they either were, or conceivably might have been, acquainted. In this, as in other things, he belonged to the class of "germinal" writers. And his influence on the early, although impermanent, creeds and tempers of the most brilliant young men of his day was quite extraordinary.[1]

[1] *Note to Third Edition.*—Some notice should perhaps be given to the special cultivators of Criticism—a division of serious literature which had been at length raised to "cabinet rank" by Dryden and Addison. Johnson and some others of those who distinguished themselves elsewhere also have been noticed, and further reference to the subject will be found *infra*, at p. 650. The most noteworthy books and persons to which attention should be drawn here are: the *Art of English Poetry* of Edward Bysshe (London, 1700? 1702?), a rigid formulation of the extremest "correctness" in regard to prosody—syllabic uniformity, middle pause, etc.; Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Edinburgh, 1783, but delivered for more than twenty years previously), which expand and embellish the same creed; the very interesting *Elements of Criticism* (Edinburgh, 1761) of Henry Home, Lord Kames, a book fantastic in parts and incomplete in others, but full of suggestion; the acute and important *Philosophy of Rhetoric* of Dr. George Campbell, published 1777, but written, at least in part, very much earlier.

CHAPTER V

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DRAMA

The conundrum of the drama—Fading of eighteenth-century tragedy—Minor comic writers: the domestic play—Goldsmith—Sheridan—His three great pieces

If the suddenness of the rise of the English drama, though sometimes exaggerated, is still one of the most striking facts in literary history, the suddenness, and the enduring nature, of its collapse are hardly less curious. For rather less than a hundred and fifty years, from the eighth decade of the sixteenth century to the second of the eighteenth, there was no time, save that of the closing of the theatres under the Rebellion, when work at once of great literary merit and of acting value, according at least to the idea of the time, was not produced. For a good deal more than another hundred and fifty, from the second decade of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth, only two dramatists have appeared who have combined very high literary with distinctly high acting value in their plays, and these two both appeared during the first half of the time. To add to the puzzle, the popularity and the profits of the theatre have steadily increased, and the touch of discredit which once attached to writing for the stage has all but entirely disappeared. No plausible guess at the solution of this problem, on any of the grounds of so-called scientific criticism, has ever been made except the concurrent rise of the novel, and this, though not exactly nugatory, is clearly insufficient. We have, in short, here one of the capital instances of that fact which communicates to the study of literature itself a vast proportion of its fascination and its value, the fact of incalculableness.

The conundrum of the drama.

One of the signs of this change was a curious separation which appeared early in the eighteenth century, and has maintained itself more or less ever since, between the literary drama, which was sometimes acted, but never with any real acting success, and the acting drama, which, though not immediately abandoning (as sometimes later) all pretensions to be literature, yet practically does not aim at being read at all. At every time from Johnson's to

Tennyson's, poets and men of letters, who were not to the manner born, have tried the stage. But with the exception (and hardly that) of the late Mr. Browning, there is not a single one of them whose dramatic work has kept any fame, or who is ever thought of as a dramatist. Young's *Revenge*, acted 1721, connects itself rather with the older than with the newer school, and is perhaps the very last example of an acting tragedy of real literary merit, but it is to be feared that few even of those who have read the *Night-Thoughts* and the *Universal Passion* have read it. The dramas of Thomson are far worse, and far more utterly forgotten; hardly any edition of him for years has contained them. Johnson's *Irene* is a byword, not altogether justly perhaps, for it is a fine piece of writing; and Mason's *Elfrida* and *Caractacus* are chiefly known, even to students of eighteenth-century literature, because they make some figure in the letters of their author's faithful and too indulgent friend, Gray. Of the work of men like Mallet, Glover, and others, so little of any kind is retained by the general memory that their dramas can hardly be said to be in exceptional oblivion; but the gloom of this is never pierced even by those feeble gleams which faintly reveal "William and Margaret" and "Admiral Hosier's Ghost." A sort of affection, mingled with contempt, and connected with the universally known "My name is Norval," keeps in twilight rather than utter darkness the once famous *Douglas* (1754) of Home (1724-1808). But it is pretty certain that most audiences, and almost all modern readers, would be affected by it with the same sort of *fou rire* as that which Thackeray, by a slight anachronism, ascribes to General Lambert and Mr. George Warrington at an early performance of the play.

Fading of eighteenth-century tragedy.

The fact is that the whole cast of eighteenth-century thought and style was unfavourable, and almost fatal, to the composition of tragedy that should be at once practicable and poetic. Its conventions, its artificial poetical diction, and its dread of anything irregular, could at the best have produced something of the Racinian kind, a kind to which the English genius is utterly recalcitrant, and which does not suit itself to the English theatre. Alternate tameness and rant accordingly disfigure it, though no philosophical explanation quite attains to explaining the ineffable sham-tragic lingo which, from Rowe downwards, took firmer and ever firmer possession of the English stage, till it was finally driven therefrom, by literary satire and popular disgust, within living memory.

Comedy, as is usually the case, was somewhat less unfortunate. To get tragic action adjusted to literary form requires not merely a rare talent in the playwright, but an atmosphere, an *aura* of receptiveness in the audience, which exists only at times few and far

between. The problem of the comic writer is far simpler, and his atmosphere, though it varies in fineness and freshness, always exists.

Minor comic writers: the domestic play.

During the eighteenth century especially the general tone of manners, and the clearly recognised divisions of society, lent themselves to an easy adaptation of the perennial commonplaces of comedy. When the last minorities of the great comic school—Steele, Cibber, Mrs. Centlivre—ceased to write, the stage was by no means left bare of stuff, which generally showed familiarity with its own requirements and traditions, and which occasionally displayed tolerable literary form.

There was indeed, between tragedy and comedy, and of the kind which, popular at the same time in France, was called, according as it inclined to one side or the other, *tragédie bourgeoise* or *comédie larmoyante*, a certain production during the time. Two or three pieces, the *George Barnwell* and *Fatal Curiosity* of Lillo (1693-1739) and the *Gamester* of Edward Moore, held the stage with some tenacity, and made a sort of lodgment in literary history, but they can hardly be called of much importance. Yet George Lillo, as a curiosity at least, and because of the constant, and sometimes excellent, fun of which his chief play was long the subject, must always retain some interest. His editor,[1] Johnson's friend and butt, Tom Davies, could find out very little about him, except that he "learned and practised the trade of a jeweller." His work is not extensive, but it is very representative. He adapted *Pericles* and *Arden of Feversham*, and spoilt both. His *Silvia, or the Country Burial* is an *opera-bouffe* of an incoherency which would be triumphant if it were intended. *The Fatal Curiosity* in verse and *George Barnwell* in prose (the latter, from the supposed usefulness of its moral to apprentices, constantly acted) are the strangest muddles of broken, or sound but stiff, decasyllables (*Barnwell* itself is full of the former), the impossible lingo above referred to, action more impossible still, and, notwithstanding all this, touches of humanity, good feeling, and genuine, though awkward, pathos.

Comedy, besides the two great exceptions, was but a little better off, though a great deal was written. Charles Shadwell, a nephew (or a son?) of "Og," wrote some lively plays, one of them, *The Fair Quaker of Deal*, anticipating Smollett in studying the sailor from life. Fielding, as has been said, before he found his proper vocation, did much for the stage, and in the middle and later days of the century there were many playwrights who came nearer to the union of theatrical and literary competence than any tragedian of their time—or ours. George Colman (1732-94), a Westminster boy,[2]

[1] 2nd ed. 2 vols. London, 1810.

[2] To be distinguished from his son, George Colman the younger (1762 1836),

manager of Covent Garden, was a very prolific, if not exactly a very original dramatist, and his *Clandestine Marriage* (1766) is the least forgotten of more than a score of plays. Garrick had a hand in it, as he had in others, and he did some work of the kind independently. Arthur Murphy, the biographer of Fielding and the friend of Johnson, also wrote plays with great freedom, and *The Way to Keep Him* survives in much the same relation to literature as that of *The Clandestine Marriage*. *The Suspicious Husband* (1747) of Benjamin Hoadly, a clever son of the Arian Bishop, who did other dramatic work, half original, half adapted, belongs to the same class, as does the *False Delicacy* of Hugh Kelly. Farce and comic opera, the latter stimulated by the great success of Gay, kept also near to literature, and Fielding's *Tom Thumb* was kept in company by the *Chrononhotonthologos* of Henry Carey, a son of Halifax and an ancestor of Kean, and author of the delightful "Sally in our Alley." Mrs. Cowley (1743-1809) produced some lively pieces, of which *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780) has best kept name and (sometimes) the stage. Macklin's *Man of the World* (1764), Townley's *High Life Below Stairs* (1759), and several works, especially *The Minor* and *The Mayor of Garrat* of Samuel Foote, may join the catalogue. Towards the close of the century Richard Cumberland, a rather curious person, and better known to literature as Sir Fretful Plagiary, but a scholar, a skilful playwright, and no contemptible man of letters, represented the sentimental side of drama, John O'Keefe the wilder farce, and Holcroft, the friend of Godwin, a rather powerful variety of what the French call *drame*. *The West Indian* of Cumberland, which appeared in 1771, O'Keefe's *Agreeable Surprise*, and Holcroft's *Road to Ruin* (1792) are their chief remembered things.

Goldsmith and Sheridan stand far apart from these. Both, it will be observed, were Irishmen, like Farquhar, Charles Shadwell, Murphy, and O'Keefe. Goldsmith's dramas, as noted in the sketch of his life above, were the result of his later years. *The Good-natured Man* has admirable scenes and passages and some good character, but in all respects it is far the inferior of *She Stoops to Conquer*. In this delightful play Goldsmith may have taken some of the incidents (as he is said to have taken the central one) from real life, and some of the characters from Steele (*vide supra*, p. 535). But this is less than nothing. The bright, fantastic, yet not unreal atmosphere of whimsical incident, the gracious humanity of the characters generally, and the exquisite literary quality of the dialogue, compose such a thing as the English stage had not seen since it was reopened after the Restoration. The wit, if less

Goldsmith.

like him, but in the next generation, a busy and clever playwright and comic miscellanist. His *Heir-at-Law* (1797) is a notable piece.

volleyed and regular, was not inferior to Congreve's, the action was not really less probable, and while there was nothing mawkish about the sentiment (there was perhaps a little about that of *The Good-natured Man*), its sweet and healthy good-nature contrasts, in a fashion inexpressibly agreeable, with the loveless license and the brutal ferocity of the Restoration drama.

The fame of Richard Brinsley Butler Sheridan in literature is far more exclusively dramatic, for his theatrical and rather brassy oratory holds little place in literary memory. He was born in Dublin in 1751, and was the grandson of Swift's friend, Dr. Sheridan, a clergyman not much inferior to the Dean himself in a certain reckless wit, though possessed of little or nothing of his friend's magnificent intellect. His second son, Richard Brinsley's father, was a teacher of elocution, and one of Dr. Johnson's associates and butts. This man, whose dulness was declared by the dictator to be beyond the reach of nature, unassisted by art and by patient and careful effort, married Miss Frances Chamberlaine, who contributed a novel (*Sidney Biddulph*) to the crop of fiction in the middle of the century. Sheridan himself was a Harrow boy, and attempted literary work very early. In 1773, at the age of twenty-two, he eloped from Bath, where his family were then living, with Elizabeth Linley, a very beautiful girl with an exquisite voice, which her husband very properly refused to allow her to use on the stage. But he himself turned to play-writing (which, indeed, he had attempted earlier), and in January 1775, when he was not four-and-twenty, produced at Covent Garden the famous farce-comedy of *The Rivals*, which at once (or almost at once) established his fame. He followed this up with the bad *St. Patrick's Day*, and the better, though still hardly good, *Duenna*. Next year Sheridan, with some assistance from friends, bought first half and then the whole of the patent of Drury Lane, of which he became manager as well as owner. This provided him with an income, and ought to have provided him with an ample one for the remainder of his life, but his whole money affairs, from the way in which he found the means to buy the theatre onward, are much of a mystery.

Sheridan.

In 1780 he entered Parliament, attached himself to the Whig Opposition, and, rather later, became very intimate with the Prince of Wales. He had office under the Rockingham ministry and the Coalition, and attracted great attention by effective but meretricious speeches against Warren Hastings. He was faithful to the extremer Whigs, and took the opposite side to Burke (whom he had previously followed) in regard to the French Revolution. In 1795, his wife having died some years earlier, he married again: and he survived till 1816, when he died with bailiffs in his house.

An extravagant hyperbole of Byron's as to the relative excellence of Sheridan's plays has perhaps done him some harm, but his three best pieces are of extraordinary merit. They were all produced between 1775 and 1779; each is a masterpiece in its kind, and the kinds are not identical. *The Rivals* is artificial comedy, inclining on one side to farce, and, in the parts of Falkland and Julia, to the sentimental. But it is, on its own rather artificial plan, constructed with remarkable skill and tightness; and the characters of Sir Anthony Absolute, Mrs. Malaprop, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and Bob Acres, with almost all the rest, combine fun with at least theatrical verisimilitude in a very rare way. Indeed, Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop, though heightened from life, can hardly be said to be false to it, and though in the other pair the license of dramatic exaggeration is pushed to its farthest, it is not exceeded. The effect could not have been produced without the sparkling dialogue, but this alone could not have given it.

His three great pieces.

The School for Scandal flies higher, but not quite so steadily. Pedants of construction fall more foul of it, and even those who do not accept their standards must admit that the characters are less uniformly alive. But they, like the play generally, aim higher; it is no longer artificial comedy with stock personages, but a great comic castigation of manners that is attempted. In *The Rivals* Sheridan had vied with Vanbrugh and had beaten him; in *The School for Scandal* he challenges Molière, and is hardly beaten except in a certain universality. As for his third masterpiece, *The Critic*, it is simply a farce *in excelsis*, designedly extravagant and chaotic, but all the more successful. The mock-play is admittedly almost, if not quite, the best thing of the kind, and the by-play of Sneer, Puff, Dangle, and the immortal Sir Fretful Plagiary requires none of the illegitimate attraction of identification with real personages to give it zest. *The Critic* forms with *The Rehearsal* and *The Rovers* a triad of which English literature may well be proud. It is difficult, allowing for the scale of each, to choose between the three, but in variety and reach *The Critic* may be allowed frankly to carry it.

Of the state of things in drama which followed Sheridan's time, and, as some hold, has lasted without much change to the present day, Joanna Baillie (1762-1851), whose life stretched from a few years past the middle of the eighteenth century to just after the middle of the nineteenth, is an interesting illustration. She had some poetic faculty; but her *Plays on the Passions* (1798 and later) and others, though admired at the time, and sometimes acted, are neither great drama nor great literature, the author never seeming quite to know whether she is writing for the theatre or the study, and not producing the best things for either.

CHAPTER VI

MISCELLANEOUS WRITERS

The letter-writers—Lady Mary—Chesterfield—Horace Walpole—"Junius"—Boswell

THE heading of this chapter is not a mere capitulation to difficulties. Very little is gained by sorting out authors too exactly into divisions and compartments, and something would be lost by omitting to indicate within the classification two distinct features of our eighteenth-century literature—the constant divergence and diversion of literary energy into new directions and efforts, and the increase of the practice of writing for amusement merely. Some of the most celebrated books of the century were never intended for publication at all—Lord Chesterfield's *Letters* certainly were not, though we cannot be so sure about those of Horace Walpole and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Moreover, the diffusion of reading, the removal of the censorship of the press, and the mitigation of the legal tribulations to which authors and publishers were liable, encouraged the production of books of all kinds.

The three writers named in the last paragraph themselves form a very interesting trio from many points of view. They as letter-writers, like Pepys and Evelyn earlier as diarists, supply the chief examples in English of that memoir-literature in which our language is, as compared with French, rather poor, but which in their case, as in a few others, can very well hold up its head.

The letter-writers.

The lady who bears in English literature the courtesy title of "Lady Mary," without any necessary addition, was, oddly enough, connected with Evelyn by blood and with Pepys by marriage. Her maiden name was Pierrepont, and she was daughter of the Earl of Kingston, a Whig noble, who was successively raised to the Marquisate of Dorchester and the Dukedom of Kingston. Her extreme beauty as a child — beauty which continued till early middle life at least — made her the heroine

Lady Mary.

of a well-known anecdote to the effect that she was, when eight years old, not merely toasted at, but introduced to, the Kit-Cat Club of Whigs and wits by her father. She seems to have been born in 1689, and at twenty-two eloped with Edward Wortley or Wortley Montagu, grandson of Pepys's relation and patron, the first Earl of Sandwich, and heir to the great Yorkshire estate of Wharncliffe. When George I. came to the throne Mr. Wortley Montagu had preferment, and in 1716 he went as ambassador to Constantinople, his wife accompanying him, and so obtaining the materials for her best-known, though not best, Letters. When she came back she brought inoculation with her—there is at least one story that the loss of her own beauty was due to smallpox—and made it fashionable in England. She lived at home for nearly the whole of the third and fourth decades of the century, became, for what cause is uncertain, an object of hate from Pope as furious as his admiration had formerly been fantastic, and in 1739 went abroad without her husband, with whom, however, she never seems to have had the least quarrel. She lived, in Italy chiefly, for some twenty years more, and returned to England in 1761 after her husband's death, to die herself of cancer next year. She had two children—a daughter, who married the famous Lord Bute, and a very worthless and probably insane son.

Lady Mary might probably have attained distinction in several different kinds of literature.[1] She was actually, and rather to her own misfortune, a very deft writer of light satirical verse, while no doubt much that she did not write was attributed to her. Her *Town Eclogues* are distinctly good; but the best thing she ever did in this kind is the famous piece beginning—

> Good madam, when ladies are willing
> A man can but look like a fool,

and ending—

> The fruit that can fall without shaking
> Is rather too mellow for me.

Her prose work is much more extensive and important. It consists of a large collection of *Letters* extending over some fifty years. There are some difficulties about their text and first publication, and the authenticity of some has been doubted, perhaps with not much justice. They fall generally into four divisions—those before the Turkish journey, containing a very odd picture of a courtship and some lively sketches of George I.'s household; the Turkish and other continental letters of the first sojourn abroad, which are very lively and interesting, but a trifle artificial; those of the middle period, few in comparison and

[1] *Letters*, etc., ed. Moy Thomas, 2 vols. London, 1861.

too often distinguished by the ill-nature of a Queen of Society whose charms and power are passing; and those of the last, mainly written to Lady Bute, and the most interesting of the whole, alternating as they do between curious pictures of Italian country life, the Jacobite society of Avignon, the *tracasseries* of the English colony at Venice and the like on the one hand, and on the other full, shrewd, and invaluable criticisms of the new novels of the day from Fielding and Smollett downwards. There is a certain hardness about Lady Mary, and she exhibits to the very full the indifference of her age to all high things in religion, poetry, and elsewhere. But her cleverness is astonishing, and one can see, if only by glimpses, that she must have been lovable once.

Chesterfield.

Philip Dormer Stanhope, fourth Earl of Chesterfield, the author of the most famous and widely known, if not the most voluminous or best letters in English, was a few years younger than Lady Mary, having been born in September 1694. He too was of a Whig family, and went to the Whig University, Cambridge. After this experience and its completion of foreign travel (by which he profited a good deal more than most of the English tutor-conducted youths upon whom both he and Lady Mary are so severe), he sat in the House of Commons for ten years, until his succession to the earldom in 1726. For all his devotion to "the Graces," his gambling, and his other condescensions to the ways of his time, Chesterfield was a man of political ability, which did not fall far short of positive statesmanship, and he distinguished himself in various offices, the most important of which was the Lord-Lieutenancy of Ireland. But he became deaf, and perhaps disgusted, and retired from active public life about 1748. He had written earlier in the *Craftsman*, as he wrote later in the *World*. A few other minor things, "Characters," and the like, show the great literary ability and the thorough knowledge of part of human nature which he possessed. But his literary fame was derived from a publication which (unlike some letter-writers) he never intended, that of his correspondence with his illegitimate son Philip Stanhope, printed by that son's widow. He also wrote a good many other letters, and within recent years a fresh batch of advices to the young, addressed this time to his godson and successor in the title, was added by the late Earl of Carnarvon.

The hardness which has been noted in Lady Mary appears to a greater extent, as was natural, in Chesterfield; and though Johnson's undying grudge exaggerated the immorality which accompanies it, that immorality certainly exists. But as a letter-writer, in his few excursions into the essay, and in such other literary amusements as he permitted himself, he stands very high, and the somewhat artificial character of his etiquette, the wholly artificial character of his standards

of literary, æsthetic, and other judgment, ought not to obscure his excellence. Devoted as he was to French, speaking and writing it as easily as he did English, he never Gallicised his style as Horace Walpole did, nor fell into incorrectnesses as did sometimes Lady Mary. The singular ease with which, not in the least ostentatiously condescending to them, he adjusts his writing to his boy correspondents is only one function of his literary adaptability. Nor is it by any means to be forgotten that Chesterfield's subjects are extremely various, and are handled with equal information and mother-wit. He was not exactly a scholar, but he was a man widely and well read, and the shrewdness of his judgment on men and things was only conditioned by that obstinate refusal even to entertain any enthusiasm, anything high-strung in ethics, æsthetics, religion, and other things, which was characteristic of his age. Had it not been for Chesterfield we should have wanted many lively pictures of society, manner, and travel; but we should also have wanted our best English illustration of a saying of his time, though not of his—"If there were no God, it would be necessary to create one."

Lady Mary and Lord Chesterfield were persons of extreme and even talent, which never quite reached genius. In the third of the great trio of letter-writers we find a curious mixture of something by no means unlike genius, and of most undoubted originality, with the qualities and the limitations of a very decided fribble and coxcomb. Horace Walpole ranked as the third son of the great Sir Robert, to whose late and not fortunate title of Earl of Orford he himself—very late in his life—succeeded. He was born in London in September 1717, and after passing through Eton and Cambridge, travelled, as noted above, in Italy with Gray. After his return to England, and for long afterwards, he sat in Parliament, but he had no political ability, and only partisan political interests. Being comfortably provided for by office and bequest, he was able to live very much as he pleased, and soon established himself at Strawberry Hill, near Twickenham, where he built, affecting "the Gothick taste" more well than wisely, his famous villa. After a time he even set up a press there. Besides an enormous number of letters, very partially collected,[1] he wrote in the *World*, produced the wonderfully original, if not wonderfully good, novel of *The Castle of Otranto*, and the strong, though again not good, tragedy of *The Mysterious Mother*, compiled *Anecdotes of Painting*, *Catalogues of Engravers*, *Catalogues of Royal and Noble Authors*, *Historic Doubts*, and other things, besides editing or reprinting Grammont, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and much else.

Horace Walpole.

[1] Mrs. Toynbee has at last, 1905, issued at the Clarendon Press the completest if not an absolutely complete collection in 16 vols.

In literary history Horace Walpole has no small importance as the author of *The Castle of Otranto*, and is not quite devoid of it as the author of *The Mysterious Mother*. But to the reader, and not the mere reader only, his *Letters* give him far greater interest. Their enormous bulk is not marred, as is the case in some other collections, by a constant repetition of the same subject to different correspondents, and the variety of the subjects themselves is altogether extraordinary. For part of the politics, much of the personal history, and almost all the social gossip, chit-chat, manners, and what not of the middle of the eighteenth century, Walpole is an authority to be trusted indeed with caution (for he was extremely spiteful, and by no means scrupulous), but to be enjoyed almost without alloy or satiety. No matter whether it be the execution of the Jacobite lords, or a frolic to the public gardens with madcap ladies, who insist on cooking chickens in a china dish which is expected every minute to fly about their ears, whether it be bric-à-brac or scandal, Walpole contrives to be always amusing and never silly, though he may sometimes be not wholly sensible. And it is only fair to admit that the intrinsic charm of his matter is very much helped by the peculiarities of his style. It is not by any means wholly natural—it would not have suited the hour or the man if it had been; but its affectation and its frippery are exactly suited to the part which the writer wished to play, and seldom out of keeping with the matters he had to handle. There is plenty of ill-nature in Walpole, some snobbery, a good many other failings positive and negative; but there is also genius, and the genius is of a distinctly literary kind.

Of minor memoir- and letter-writers it would be possible to name not a few, from Lord Hervey, the friend of Lady Mary and the enemy of Pope, downwards; but hardly any absolutely demands mention. There is, however, one writer who, from the mystery attending his person at least as much as from the excellence of his writings, has attracted in the past, and still to some extent attracts, a rather disproportionate attention, and this is the author of the *Letters of Junius*. Into the personal and identifying question there is not any need to enter deeply here, for it has no literary consequence, if indeed it has any consequence at all, and, as in all much-debated problems, the heat which the discussion of it excites is sometimes in inverse proportion to the importance of the decision. It is enough to say that the series of letters signed "Junius," and published by Woodfall, who himself was ignorant of the identity of his contributor, appeared in the *Public Advertiser* from January 1769 to a period some three years later. They attacked the king, the ministers (especially the Duke of Grafton), and a great number of things and persons connected with the admini-

"Junius."

stration of the day. They showed inside knowledge of official matters. They were, though repeatedly printed, never acknowledged by any one. They were attributed to Edmund Burke, to his brother Richard, to Lord Temple, to Lord George Sackville, to Lord Shelburne, to Barré, to Wilkes, to Horne Tooke, to Glover, to Wedderburn, to Gerard Hamilton, but especially to Philip, afterwards Sir Philip, Francis, an Irishman, the son of the translator of Horace, who was born in Dublin in 1740, entered the Civil Service, held a position in the War Office, was sent out to India as a Member of Council, became a bitter opponent of Warren Hastings, and fought a duel with him, returned, sat in Parliament on the extremer Whig side, and died in 1818.[1] The evidence connecting Francis with "Junius," though entirely circumstantial, and certainly not decisive even as such, is very strong, and at any rate far outweighs that advanced in favour of any other candidate for a rather bad eminence.

For the *Letters of Junius*, while they display some of the worst qualities of the human soul—arrogance, spite, jealousy, and hardly one really good or great quality, inasmuch as their very denunciation of abuses is evidently but personal, or at best partisan—are far less intellectually and artistically remarkable than it used to be, and sometimes still is, the fashion to represent them. The immense importance attaching to oratory in the eighteenth century—when a single fortunate speech might bring a man office, wealth, hereditary dignity, and almost everything most coveted—together with a rhetorical tradition starting at least from Bolingbroke, and possibly from Halifax, had made a certain rather stereotyped and very conventional fashion of writing the subject of constant practice and of not infrequent attainment. Burke is the great example of this practice, carried beyond convention, beyond rhetoric, beyond even eloquence, into great permanent literature. "Junius" is the chief example of it in its lower and quite undivine form. An affectation of exaggerated moral indignation, claptrap rhetorical interrogations, the use, clever enough if it were not so constant, of balanced antitheses, a very good ear for some, though by no means many, cadences and rhythms, some ingenuity in trope and metaphor, and a cunning adaptation of that trick of specialising with proper names with which Lord Macaulay has surfeited readers for the last half-century—these, though by no means all, are the chief features of the Junian method. But the effect is not in the least marmoreal, as Burke's is. It has, on the contrary, two qualities of the usual imitation of marble—it is plaster

[1] Still other claimants of less mark, one H. M. Boyd, one Rosenhagen, one Greatrakes, are mentioned by Wraxall (*Own Time*, i. p. 447, *sq.*). The great maintainer of "anti-Franciscan" arguments was the late Mr. Fraser Rae; but the question has latterly rather dropped.

and it is hollow. As a man of letters the author has done well a conventional exercise not worth the doing. As a man of morals he has put talents great, if not consummate, at the service at best of party, at worst of self.

Boswell.

Far different is the history and far higher the merits of a yet more famous book, some twenty years younger, which also belongs of right to this Book and chapter. James Boswell, younger of Auchinleck, was born in Edinburgh in October 1740. He was the heir to an old family and a good estate, had talents of various kinds, wrote a popular *Account of Corsica* in 1768, and in his later years (he died in 1795) made some bid both for political and professional success. But he is for posterity nothing but the author of the *Life of Dr. Johnson*, published in 1791, with its earlier complement, the *Tour to the Hebrides* (1773). Boswell had devoted himself to Johnson as early as 1763, and for the remaining twenty-one years of the sage's life, though not very frequently or for very long periods in his company, was in pretty constant communication with him, was (though Johnson could not avoid rough treatment of his follies) on the whole tolerated by the great man as he tolerated no one else, took infinite pains both before and after his idol's death to procure all the information he could about him, and wove it into one of the most extraordinary books in literature—a book which from the day of its appearance to the present has been quarrelled over, accounted for in a score of different ways, given up as a hopeless enigma, but always read and rejoiced in. Those who like Boswell at first like him ever better; those who do not like him at first (such cases have been known) with rare exceptions become converted to him afterwards. Some of his greatest admirers think him a whole fool; nearly every one thinks him in large part foolish. Except Pepys, whom in not a few ways he resembled, there is perhaps no author whom we regard with so much affection mixed with so much contempt. And he has written a biography of very great size, which is all but universally allowed to be the best, with but one rival, in literature, and which some hold to be best with no rival at all.

Of many other writers, we may select Gilbert White of Selborne (1720-1793) and William Gilpin of Boldre (1724-1804), because of the immense influence upon literature of the tendency which the *Natural History of Selborne* (1789), and the series of "Picturesque Tours" (*The Highlands*, 1778; *The Wye*, 1782; *The Lakes*, 1789; *Forest Scenery*, 1791; *The West of England*, 1798) expressed. White's volume is a plain but vivid record of observation of nature; Gilpin's books, a little more florid in style, are elaborately illustrated in aquatint. Both exemplify the craving to get close to nature, the determination to "count the streaks of the tulip" and value its hues.

INTERCHAPTER IX

THE actual contents of the foregoing Book require less classification and comment of the specific kind than has been the case with any of those preceding it; but their general character, taken into conjunction with that of Book VIII., and the lessons of the change to which we are now coming, require some larger notice. For we are once more approaching one (and up to the present day the last) of the great turning-points of English literature—a turning-point of a definiteness and moment which had been only twice equalled before, at the beginning of the Elizabethan great time with Lyly and Spenser, and at the Restoration. The Augustan ages, with their continuation in the mid- and later-eighteenth century, were closed in fact, though not in general opinion, by the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. But they had had notice of closing before. What these notices were we must now briefly indicate, concluding with a short summary and criticism of the main aspects of literature from the rise of Dryden to the death of Burke.

The agencies of the change admit, of course, of very different appreciation, but both in number and order the following summary will probably be not far from doing justice to them. Almost immediately after the beginning of the century there began also a certain indefinite but very perceptible "harking back" to older literature in various forms—the antiquarian efforts of Oldys, the editorial labours of Theobald, the collection of ballads, English and Scottish, as definite curiosities. The poetical work of Thomson had more effect in the same direction than its author knew, or in any probability intended, and its own suffusion with conventionality did little harm and (by rendering it more palatable to the wits and the town) some good. A little later still the same mixture of conventional externals and Romantic spirit meets us in the scanty but intense poetical work of Collins, in the almost as scanty and less intense, but curiously anxious and "questing," poetical work of Gray, and in the wide, various, and far-reaching, though insufficiently productive, literary studies of the latter. The Thomsonian mixture is more perceptible still in Shenstone, because this latter, though an undeveloped and

irregular, is a decidedly germinal critic, whereas in Thomson there is little sign of the critical spirit. And then, at or about the year 1760, there meets us a whole group of important symptoms, or stimulants, or both—*The Castle of Otranto*, Percy's *Reliques*, Macpherson's *Ossian*—all expressing, and the two last at any rate powerfully helping on, the complete Romantic revival itself—a revival further expressed in curiously different ways a few years later by the rich work of Chatterton and the poor work of Beattie.[1]

Opinions may differ as to the cause of the still further postponement of the Revival itself, and some will probably still take refuge in the apparently pusillanimous, but certainly prudent, and perhaps not really unsound, doctrine of "the Hour and the Man." But it does not seem quite foolish, or even very fanciful, to attribute to the enormous literary influence of Johnson an effect in keeping back the growth which (though such was very far from being his wish) had the beneficent effect of the "pinching" process so well known to gardeners. That it was beneficent there can be no doubt, and more than one of the examples just referred to shows this amply. The general literary mind was as yet not nearly enough educated in the way in which it wished to go. As Percy, as Macpherson, as Chatterton, as Beattie showed in their different fashions, as was shown still more by the deplorable creatures of the last twenty years, the aims, the ideas, the conceptions of the new school were quite vague and very ill-informed. Only Gray really knew something of mediæval English literature, and modern literature other than English; and Gray's knowledge was divorced from power, further enfeebled (it may be suspected) by a divided allegiance, and rather sicklied o'er with its own learning. The robuster labours of the Wartons, the Tyrwhitts, the Ritsons were needed to supply the actual stuff of knowledge, as well as the positive genius of a new generation to supply the power of using it. That powerful assistance was given by

[1] Of especial interest in regard to this matter are the *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* of Richard (not then Bishop) Hurd, published in 1762, before the *Reliques*, or *The Castle of Otranto*, or all but the first-fruits of *Ossian*. Hurd (1720-1808), successively Bishop of Lichfield and Worcester, was in character rather a pompous *parvenu*, and injured his reputation by making himself a sort of ban-dog to Warburton. But his writings, at least the critical part of them, can be spoken of with contempt by no good critic who has read them. They are gropings rather than discoveries, marred by imperfect knowledge, by superciliousness, by mistaken attempts to adjust Classical methods to Romantic matter. But the man who in 1762 recognised that there was a Romantic Unity, distinct from the Aristotelian, was a critic if ever there was one. His *Dissertations on Poetry* are less good than the *Letters*, and his *Commentaries* on Horace are "old style," with some modern touches. But his *Dialogues* probably gave Landor no slight hint for the *Imaginary Conversations;* and any one who will compare Hurd with Blair will soon see which is on the right side in literature.

two (for Blake exercised none, and Crabbe very little till later) of the four chief poets *c.* 1780 there can be no doubt. Both Cowper and Burns deepened the tendency to get out of the library and into the fields and woods, to see directly and not through borrowed glasses, to express directly and not in phrase of common form; while to some, at least, the mere *alterative* powers of Burns's dialect must always hold a high place in the calculation. The German influence of the very latest years of the century was also real, though much more alloyed, and working by no means wholly for good; while that of the French Revolution, though it may easily be exaggerated, can no more be denied than can the influence of the three great changes at the junction of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries on the literary growths which followed them. It is not for nothing that the three leaders of the new movement were all deeply influenced by Godwin, that Godwin's philosophy shot into crystal at the touch of the Revolution itself, and that the essence of it was anarchy, in the sense of refusing accepted conventions, in everything. All three were to recoil from this eventually, but the two greatest of them never allowed the recoil to affect their literary position. They struck—Wordsworth rather blindly and instinctively, Coleridge with reason—at the whole convention of the period immediately behind them, and the literary practice of a hundred years has followed up their blows.

What, then, was this convention, and to what does the crusade against it amount? It is not a mere idle play on words to answer the first part of this question that the convention was Convention itself.

Like most long-dominant creeds, this was not the work of a single man, or the definite and conscious expression of the opinions of a single mind. The four greatest exponents of it, Dryden, Addison, Pope, and Johnson, undoubtedly brought it about, but it may be questioned whether any but the last—perhaps whether even he—was a consciously convinced apostle of it. Dryden, its founder, was an explorer, an experimenter to his very death-day; his theories were in a constant condition of readjustment and flux, and they, as well as his practice, included a great deal of stuff which was not part of the classical-conventional creed at all, and suited it but oddly In adopting and carrying out the demands of his time for a clearer, plainer, more business-like style in verse and prose, he was induced, as a makeshift, to take up with the French "classical" theories to a certain extent, but this was chiefly in consequence of his curious preference for adaptation over creation. His immediate successors, the two great lawgivers of the eighteenth century in verse and prose respectively, were men excellently suited for their own purposes, but rather unfortunately devised for the general good of literature. Addison was a man of good but rather partial reading, with an intellect

neat rather than powerful, a hater of excess, but rather tolerant of defect and littleness. Pope was one of the very greatest artists that ever existed, but an artist pure and simple, a man of no learning, of no extensive intellect, and greater in his art than his art among others. Again, Johnson's chief characteristic was a conservatism just too obstinately tinged with mere common sense, a determination, a little too dogged and narrow, to adorn the Sparta he had got, and no other literary city. And so, the general taste assisting, a really haphazard, though seemingly orderly, convention of conventions came into existence. Men praised "correctness" without having any more real standard of it than a misunderstanding by Pope of Boileau's misunderstanding of Horace, who had himself misunderstood the Greeks. They turned, instinctively rather than in theory, away from wild nature to civilised manners. They laughed at the Middle Ages, and filled their poems with personifications as unreal as those of the *Romance of the Rose*, and infinitely less attractive. They generalised and abstracted; they refused "to count the streaks of the tulip"—till their written imagery had the life and the outline and the colour of a mathematical diagram. Feeling—and feeling rightly—that prose ought not to be like poetry, they consecrated one particular limited kind of poetic diction as the proper uniform of verse, and (despite isolated attempts at truer metrical theory as well as practice) they clung to the separated couplet as the serious metre beyond which there was no salvation.

All this, to borrow a famous phrase of Carlyle's, the new age "[not always] modestly, but peremptorily and irrevocably denied." It was right in the denial, not so right in undervaluing, what, in pursuance or in spite of its theories, the period from 1660 to 1798 had given.

For mighty things had been given and done. In the opening portion the work of Dryden is so great that only the greatest (and very few of them) can be put above him in art, not many even in literary spirit, hardly one in craftsmanship. And this high peak is followed in the chain by the volcanic magnificence of Swift, the graceful outlines of Addison and Pope, the massive strength of Johnson and Gibbon, the varied and effective sky-line of Burke—with considerable minor heights to fill in the range. The eighteenth century by itself had created the novel and practically created the literary history; it had put the essay into general circulation; it had hit off various forms, and an abundant supply, of lighter verse; it had added largely to the literature of philosophy. Above all, it had shaped the form of English prose-of-all-work, the one thing that remained to be done at its opening. When an age has done so much, it seems somewhat illiberal to reproach it with not doing more.

BOOK X

THE TRIUMPH OF ROMANCE

CHAPTER I

THE POETS FROM COLERIDGE TO KEATS[1]

The turning-point—Coleridge—His criticism—Wordsworth—His inequality—His theories—His genius and its limitations—Southey—Scott—His poetical quality—Byron—His reputation—And contribution to English poetry—Shelley—His poems and his poetry—Keats—Landor—Moore—Campbell.

SOME slight protest has lately been made against the fixing of the year 1798, and the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge, as the definite turning-point of English literature for its last great stage as yet. It is perfectly true that no immediate general effect was produced by the book, and that no second book till *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, seven years later, showed that any other great mind had been affected. But this is not in reality a damaging argument. In almost all revolutions, literary and other, the first onset is separated from the decisive charge by a greater or lesser interval; at all turns of tide— The turning-point.

> While the tired waves, vainly breaking,
> Seem here no painful inch to gain,
> Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
> Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

The painful inch might seem not to be gained by even *The Ancient Mariner*, even by *Tintern Abbey;* but the main was flooding in all the same.

[1] In these two last Books the abstinence from critical expatiation and the omission of minor writers, which have gradually grown more and more necessary throughout this history, will, as a rule, be more than ever noticeable. In the same way, *editions* will only be given when there is special reason for it.

The most important single agent, or at least leader, in the transformation was undoubtedly Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was born at Ottery St. Mary, in Devonshire, on the 21st October 1772. Although the best poetical work of Coleridge in poetry is extremely small in bulk, while scarcely a single prose book of his, save perhaps the *Biographia Literaria*, can be said to be successful throughout in both matter and form, yet his poetry at its best reaches the absolute limits of English verse as yet written, his prose is full of suggestion and germ.[1] Moreover, his personal effect on the greatest men of his own generation was so great as to be almost uncanny. Till he knew Southey, Southey, though always fond of books, had shown little or no literary turn; till he knew Wordsworth, Wordsworth produced, or at least published, hardly anything that can be called really poetry. It is impossible to estimate the effects of their boyish and lifelong friendship on Lamb. Hazlitt, the most arrogant of men, confessed that Coleridge was the only man who taught him anything. His revival and readjustment of the old trisyllabic variations on the octosyllable started Scott; his philosophisings, not very systematic, changed the current of English philosophy. It is scarcely possible to find a movement, in verse creation or in prose criticism, between 1798 and his death, which does not directly or indirectly owe its impulse to Coleridge.

Coleridge.

It is perhaps more wonderful, when we consider this extraordinary expense of spiritual influence on others, that Coleridge produced as much and as good work as he did, than that he did not produce more and better. The virtue that went out of him was so great that little might well have been expected to remain. He seems, indeed, to have had only two periods of complete original energy, the one about 1797-98, when he was stimulated by physical and mental comfort (for he was then living with his young wife, of whom he had not yet tired, at Nether Stowey), and by the mental excitement of the companionship of Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy; the other not quite twenty years later, when he had just settled with the Gillmans at Highgate. His work before the earlier of these periods yields nothing of the first merit; that between them, and later, only scraps. At first his style was that of the usual verse-writer of the late eighteenth century, differentiated only by the inspiration of nature and topography which he had received from the sonnets of Bowles; then (and just before the great time) he had a fit of stiff Odes in the Gray-and-Collins

[1] It may be questioned whether the last, and quite recently published, book of this prose, *Anima Poetae* (London, 1895), which his grandson collected from pocket-books and note-books yet unprinted, is not as important as any. In particular, it contains more attempts in *elaborate* prose than any other.

manner, varied by the intolerable platitudes, expressed in more intolerable bombast, of the blank verse of *Religious Musings*. Of the Odes themselves, that to the *Departing Year* has flashes, and that to *France* more; while after the critical period, in 1802, the really beautiful *Dejection* comes only below his greatest things. Of the later scraps the opening of *Love*, part of *The Three Graves*, the exquisite fragment of the *Knight's Tomb*, and a few other things, alone deserve the exception recorded. For the most part he led a wandering and rather mysterious life, habitually consuming opium in excessive quantities, not presenting the spectacle of conduct in any way equal to his admirable ethical and religious principles, and always coming short of his own literary projects and designs. He was educated at Christ's Hospital, and thence went to Jesus College, Cambridge, which he left to enlist in a cavalry regiment. He was readmitted, but he never took a degree. In 1795 he married "my pensive Sara," the sister of Southey's wife, Edith, and, after being for a time a Unitarian preacher, betook himself wholly—so far as he can be said to have betaken himself to any profession at all—to that of literature. He could, when he chose, be a very effective journalist, and as the market for journalism had now risen considerably from the starvation prices of the preceding century, he sometimes earned a fair income, though he was not above accepting, and even asking for, allowances from friends, and, at any rate for some time, leaving his family as a burden on Southey. He sojourned at the Lakes, in London, in Malta (where he was secretary to Sir Alexander Ball), in Wiltshire with some people named Morgan, and finally, as was said above, at the Gillmans', between Highgate and Hampstead, where the younger generation gathered round him, and he addressed them, in the manner described for all time by Carlyle, till his death in 1834.

Although many of Coleridge's plans fell through altogether, and though his publication of what he did publish was very irregular, his actual works, if collected, even without his mere journalism, would fill many volumes. *The Fall of Robespierre*, which he and Southey published in 1794, before either had found his true vocation, is a mere curiosity, and not an interesting one. There is some, though still not very much, interest in the volume of *Poems* which Joseph Cottle published for Coleridge two years later, while in these same years he lectured in prose on literature, the lectures apparently containing many of his favourite ideas and expressions, as well as by their intermittence illustrating his fatal instability. He at different times issued by himself, or with only the slightest help, two periodicals, the *Watchman* (1795) and the *Friend* (1809), which latter, as first printed, is very different from the book known under the same

name. His share in the *Lyrical Ballads*[1] included some of his best work, and the same time saw *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel* (neither published till long after), the tragedy of *Osorio*, etc. During a subsequent visit to Germany (in company at first with the Wordsworths), he began (though some put it later) the translation of *Wallenstein*, which to some fair judges seems a much greater thing than Schiller's own work. For about ten years he lectured a good deal, though very erratically, in London, and at the close of the decade, in the years 1816-18, he published *Christabel*, the *Biographia Literaria*, *Zapolya*, and the (book) *Friend*. His later published work was not extensive, and as published not very original, though valuable collections of *Table Talk*, marginal notes on books (to the making of which he was much addicted), and the like were published after his death.

Coleridge's importance in English literature is threefold—first as an influence, in which character such brief justice as is here possible has been already done him; as a prose-writer, especially in the department of criticism, understood in its widest sense; and as a poet.

As a prose-writer his importance is limited to criticism, and to criticism rather of matter and spirit than of form and style. It has long been acknowledged that, inestimable as was the benefit he conferred upon English philosophy in the widest sense by giving it a new direction, he had no systematic constructive faculty, and could at best—it is true that he could hardly have done anything better—suggest an attitude. The attitude was that of a mediævalism inspired by much later learning, but still more by that intermediate or decadent Greek philosophy which had so much influence on the Middle Ages themselves. This is, in other words, the Romantic attitude, and Coleridge was the high priest of Romanticism, which, through Scott and Byron, he taught to Europe, re-preaching it even to Germany, from which it had partly come. He more than any one else revolutionised the English view of literature, and though unjust to the eighteenth century, and not always trustworthy in detailed remarks on earlier writers, set it on the whole on a new and sound basis. In the literary form which he gave to these and other exercitations of his he was not pre-eminently happy; both Southey and Wordsworth were better prose-writers merely as such, and Southey was far better. But even here, as far more elsewhere, Coleridge was "noticeable," and his mission was to show what to

His criticism.

[1] This famous book was professedly to illustrate two different methods of poetic treatment, Wordsworth making the common uncommon, and Coleridge the uncommon credible and acceptable. The latter object, though less distinct, was much more fully achieved than the former, for the *Ancient Mariner* accepts its conditions and performs its feat, while the best things of Wordsworth's part do not deal with everyday conceptions, and are not couched in familiar language.

admire and think, and in what temper to admire and think it, not in what special form to express the admiration or the thought.

His accomplishment as a poet was different, but was also subject to the strange limitations which not only confined but marred his work throughout. The bulk of his verse is very far from small: it extends to 500 large pages of double columns pretty closely printed.[1] But the most lavish tolerance of selection[2] has not succeeded in getting out of this mass more than half the number of small pages loosely and largely printed in single column; and not a quarter of this winnowed heap is really good grain. *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* are Coleridge's only great productions of any bulk. *Kubla Khan* is very short, and elsewhere he has only passages. Yet the quality of the better part is such that no English poet can be put far above Coleridge when only quality and not quantity is demanded. This quality is perhaps shown as well as anywhere in the fragment of *Kubla Khan* itself, where there is no disturbing element of story or character to interfere with the purely poetical part of the matter; but it is equally visible, and, of course, much more satisfactorily appreciable by the general taste, in *The Ancient Mariner*, where these things are present, and in *Christabel*, where they are provided more abundantly still, though much less artistically and finally adjusted. Diction, metre, imagery, letter-music, suggestion—all the elements of poetry are here present in intense degree, and in forms, guises, and combinations entirely novel and original. It is scarcely too much to say that in these best poems of Coleridge the poetry of the nineteenth century is almost wholly suggested, and is, to a very great extent, contained after the fashion of the oak in the acorn.

The collaborator of Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads* was, as very frequently happens in the more fortunate partnerships of life and literature, a remarkably different person from his helpmate. Born in Cumberland, but of Yorkshire stock, at the town of Cockermouth, in April 1770, William Wordsworth was the son of a lawyer and land-agent; but his father died when he was thirteen, and for some years the family luck was low. This did not, however, interfere with the future poet's education at Hawkshead Grammar School and St. John's College, Cambridge, or with his early indulgence in a career of leisure, travel, and study, not commonly enjoyed by any but the favourites of Fortune. A sojourn in France affected him greatly, though in very recent days its effect has perhaps been exaggerated; and he underwent, like Southey and Coleridge, a measles of Republicanism which very soon cured itself. His first verse appeared, as became his slightly more advanced age, before

Wordsworth.

[1] In the admirable edition of Mr. Dykes Campbell (London, 1893).

[2] Mr. Stopford Brooke's *Golden Book of Coleridge* (London, 1895).

theirs in 1793 ; and like theirs it has no great merit. A legacy of not quite a thousand pounds having fallen to him, he established himself in the South of England at different points of Somerset and Dorset, and here he fell in with Coleridge, with whom, after issuing the *Ballads*, he set out for Germany. On his return he settled at the Lakes, recovered the inheritance of which the injustice of his father's employer had deprived his family for nearly twenty years, married, and after a time received the lucrative sinecure, or practical sinecure, of Distributor of Stamps. The entire history of his life was literary and domestic, and for half a century he abode first at Grasmere, then at his well-known home of Rydal Mount, composing at leisure, publishing at intervals, believing in his own poetry with an intensity only shared by Milton among true poets, and very slowly winning first the elect, or some of them, and then the crowd, to his belief. It was about the end of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century that the general conversion was ratified—on one side by the degree of D.C.L. from Oxford, on the other by a pension from the Crown. For the last seven years of his life he was Poet-Laureate in succession to Southey, and died on 23rd April 1850.

It has been said that Wordsworth was very different from Coleridge ; there is, indeed, hardly more than one point of resemblance between them. Both were poets of the very highest power, the interval and inequality between whose best and worst poetry is vast and very nearly incomprehensible. It must be added that the incomprehensibility is greater in Wordsworth's case than in Coleridge's. The latter wrote badly or weakly, because he very seldom gave his genius a chance, because his habits were fatal to continued mental activity, because he was distracted between a dozen different literary objects, because he was at any rate very often writing, when he did write, for mere bread. In all these respects Wordsworth's lot and conduct were quite different. He devoted himself utterly and entirely to poetry, seldom thinking, hardly ever writing, anything that was not either poetry or about poetry ; he maintained himself by exercise and plain good living in the utmost mental and bodily health ; and he declined to be a bread-winner with such a magnificent steadfastness that Fate was from the first cowed, and maintained him without any effort of his own. His poetical production, accordingly, was never in the least hampered or hurried, and large as it is, the bulk is not in the least surprising, considering that it represents more than half a century of waking moments entirely given up to it. Yet, even deducting the work of the years when Wordsworth's powers were not come to maturity and engaged in their proper work, as well as that of the years in which his natural force was abated, there is absolutely no certainty in his poetic touch.

His inequality.

Nor is this inequality to be accounted for, in any but a small degree, by his celebrated heresy about poetic diction. He had adopted, perhaps less consciously and deliberately than his prose manifesto on the subject in a preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* would have us believe, but to some extent both with consciousness and deliberation, a formula of reaction from the practice of the eighteenth century, which laid it down that poetry ought to be written in the simplest language of the common people, that even metre is an accident of it, and that the poetic essence consists wholly in fixing the result of an impassioned spiritual experience. His theory led him to the composition of some silly things, and never in the least helped him to the composition of fine ones; but in practice he constantly neglected it. No poet has a more distinct poetic diction—a diction sometimes more really stiff and non-natural than that of any Augustan of the decadence—than Wordsworth. But his success and his failures have very little more to do with this diction than with his childishnesses and his peasantries. In both moods, with both dialects, he will sometimes soar to empyrean heights, and sometimes flounder along the moor of prose with the most exasperating shamble. And it is not by any means certain (though the contrary would seem almost incredible) that he was himself fully or at all sensible of the difference. Only this of his pet heresy survived in him to the last—the conviction that the meaning, and the meaning only, was the poetry. And as it was his equally firm creed that William Wordsworth could not mean otherwise than nobly, so it was matter of breviary with him likewise that William Wordsworth could not write otherwise than well.

His theories.

There is now no difficulty, except to those who either do not possess critical power or decline to use it, in detecting, so far as such things can ever be detected, the secret of Wordsworth's poetical inequality. It is that his poetical power, though of the intensest and noblest, was very narrow in its possibilities of application, and that, reinforcing a native arrogance with an acquired theory, he thought it capable of being applied almost universally. It was his mission to reverse the general tendency of the eighteenth century by averting the attention from towns, manners, politics, systems of philosophy, and directing them upon the country, nature, the inner moral life of man, and religion. Occasionally a sort of splash of that limited but magnificent poetic genius of his has fallen beyond the usual circle; more often he has endeavoured to extend the circle at the expense of the power. Perhaps twice only, in *Tintern Abbey* and in the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, is the full, the perfect Wordsworth, with his half-pantheistic worship of nature, informed and chastened by an intense

His genius and its limitations.

sense of human conduct, of reverence and almost of humbleness, displayed in the utmost poetic felicity. And these two are accordingly among the great poems of the world. No unfavourable criticism on either—and there has been some, new and old, from persons in whom it is surprising, as well as from persons in whom it is natural—has hurt them, though it may have hurt the critics. They are, if not in every smallest detail, yet as wholes, invulnerable and imperishable. They could not be better done.

Elsewhere, in the great range of Wordsworth's work,[1] we are in a perpetual series of ups and downs, of alternations between small things nearly as perfect as the great ones, small things imperfect or negligible, and great things in bulk which, except in solitary flashes and spurts of suddenly released genius, are dull and dead. The mighty poem of which *The Prelude*[2] and *The Excursion* are only fragments was fortunately never finished in its actual bulk; yet lines like the famous one of Newton—

> Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone,

with some passages in both portions certainly not far inferior, scarcely tempt any genuine lover of poetry to repeat his first wanderings through the estimable wilderness. The progress through the smaller poems is naturally less painful. The very early *Evening Walk* (written 1787-89) has all the author's veracity and nature-knowledge, though his style is still eighteenth-century. *Poor Susan* (written 1797) has an admirable sentiment, a clumsy metrical setting, and some capital phrase. *A Night Piece* (early 1798, and suggested doubtless by Lady Winchelsea, but not in any way copied) is valuable as giving, deliberately, the process of poetic observation, which had been so long and so sadly neglected. The 1807 collection is full of great things, which in the famous *Ode to Duty*, and not only there, reach positive magnificence. And so we might go through the whole huge volume, everywhere meeting with strange and childish freaks, with instances still more fatal of the poet's inequality to the situation he has chosen, but now and again, and not too seldom, with that ineffable combination of thought and music which reaches its

[1] The chief issues of this work after 1798 were the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800, *Poems* in 1807, the *Excursion* in 1814, the *White Doe* in 1815, the *Duddon Sonnets* in 1819, the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* in 1822, and a collection in 1836. Of his best single things not printed in 1798, *Hartleap Well* appeared in 1800, most others in 1807.

[2] *The Prelude* (finished 1805, not published till 1850) has nowadays more champions, who are not uncompromising Wordsworthians, than *The Excursion*. It possesses undoubted nobility, and a strong autobiographic interest; yet it may seem to some that much of it had been as well in prose.

highest accomplishment in the bewildering and dazzling passages of the two poems above cited.

When Wordsworth writes—

> The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion ;

or

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,

even Shakespeare, even Shelley, have little more of the echoing detonation, the auroral light, of true poetry. No third poet in English, and therefore none in any language, has anything that comes near them, though Spenser from this point of view must, and Milton from that may, be put above Wordsworth.

Not his least poetic merit, however, has yet to be noticed, and that is the firm and decisive manner in which he established the sonnet in its place. The reappearance of this form had been, as was noted in the last Book, one of the signs of the Romantic revival, and most of the poets of that revival practised it more or less. But Wordsworth was fonder of it than any of them, and his work in it was not, at its best, approached by any, until his years had increased and his strength diminished. He did not indeed take to it extremely early : his first evidence of a thorough command is the Skiddaw sonnet of 1801, the "Westminster Bridge" (1802) following rapidly ; but from that time onward not many years passed without at least one masterpiece. Wordsworth's sonnets contain almost his best work, outside the two unapproachable pieces already noted, with perhaps a very few others. And in the famous series on the River Duddon he has grappled, and more successfully than most of his followers except Dante Rossetti, with the great difficulty of a sonnet-sequence, in its parts retaining the individual charm of the form, while, as a whole, giving something like the effect of those long poems from which, except in narrative, modern taste has more and more turned away.

Modern taste has more and more turned away from the poetical work at least of the writer who, already mentioned more than once, was in the lifetime of Wordsworth and Coleridge invariably associated with them. It is certain that the strictly poetical power and value of Robert Southey were considerably inferior to theirs. Yet his verse,[1] to those who will take the trouble to read it, still has, in large parts at least, no small attraction, while it was a very great influence in its time, and expresses the tendencies of that time as clearly, if not as supremely,

Southey.

[1] Those who fear the large one-volume edition of the whole will find an excellent selection by Professor Dowden in the "Golden Treasury Series."

as any. He was the youngest of the trio, born at Bristol in August 1774, of a family entitled to write themselves *armigero* in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation, though his father was in trade and died young and nearly insolvent. Southey, however, was, by his mother's brother, educated at Westminster and at Balliol. He took no degree, and entered no regular state of life except that of marriage, which he undertook at an early age, and with no prospect of subsistence. A stay, however, in Portugal, repeated some years later, gave him a strong fancy for the languages and literatures of the Peninsula, and after some vicissitudes he gave himself up to literature, this being made possible by the generosity of his school-friend Charles Wynn, from whom he received an annuity of £160. He lived for the last forty years of his life at Greta Hall, near Keswick, where he, on very small means, collected a wonderful library, brought up not only his own family, but for some considerable time that of his erratic brother-in-law Coleridge, accomplished an astonishing amount of admirable literary work, for the most part very poorly remunerated, and died in 1843, having been for some years scarcely of sound mind. He had been made Poet-Laureate in 1813, and from the time of the foundation of the *Quarterly Review* had been one of its principal contributors. Southey's *Poems*, on which he himself serenely based his hope of immortality, and which were very highly thought of by most good judges in his own time, even by some who disliked him and his politics, were collected in ten volumes in 1837, and after his death re-collected with additions in one. Besides the already mentioned *Fall of Robespierre*, in 1794, with Coleridge, he published *Poems* with R. Lovell, another future brother-in-law; *Joan of Arc* (1795); *Poems* in two volumes towards the end of the century; *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801); *Tales*, and the long poem of *Madoc* (1805); *The Curse of Kehama* (1810); *Roderick the Goth* (1814); and the *Vision of Judgment* (1821); with a *Tale of Paraguay*, *Oliver Newman*, etc., later. Much of Southey's work, especially his largest poems of *Joan of Arc*, *Madoc*, and *Roderick*, is in a kind of blank verse, showing reaction from the couplets of the eighteenth century, but somewhat deficient in individuality and variety. Far more important, as well as far better, are the irregular and unrhymed stanzas of *Thalaba*, and the irregular but rhymed stanzas of *Kehama*. Although the unrhymed Pindaric (which Southey took from Sayers of Norwich) is pretty certainly a devout imagination merely, there are extraordinarily fine things in *Thalaba*, and its effect upon poets, so different and great as Scott and Shelley, is in no way hard to understand. *Kehama* is better still, and Southey's poetical fame seems at present likely to rest (though the revolutions of the past bid us have a care in saying this) on the best passages of

this very fine, though somewhat remotely and unpopularly conceived, poem, with a certain number of smaller pieces—"The Holly Tree," the exquisite "My days among the dead are past," the popular, and not meanly popular, "Battle of Blenheim," "Cataract of Lodore," "Well of St. Keyne," "Inchcape Rock," "Bishop Hatto," and the fine ballad of "Queen Orraca."

But there are many great passages in the longer poems, even in the *Vision of Judgment*, the fault of which is none of those indicated by Byron in his clever parody, but simply that it is panegyrical in substance and hexametrical in form. It is difficult to write a good official panegyric in English, it is nearly impossible to write good hexameters in English; and when a man chooses to encounter two such difficulties at once, it is no wonder if he be worsted. Southey had poetic gifts—even great ones—but his life was unfavourable for their development, and they were probably not of that overmastering kind which makes the possessor independent of circumstances. He thus ranks higher as a prose writer than as a poet, and his prose will be better treated in another place.

It is important to pay attention to the dates of these three careers. After 1798 and the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge published nothing of importance in verse for nearly twenty years; and Wordsworth, though he published, was not attended to. *Thalaba* and *Madoc*, on the other hand, appeared soon, and had no small popularity, *Thalaba* in particular being, as was said above, a most important poetical fact of its day. But for some seven years the public had very little poetry put before it (even Crabbe, the only veteran with a future, being silent), until *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* appeared.

Walter Scott takes rank, so far as age goes, between Wordsworth and Coleridge, having been born a year later than the former and a year earlier than the latter, on 15th August 1771. A younger child of a junior branch of the great Border clan of his name, he was born in Edinburgh (his father being a Writer to the Signet), and was himself educated for the same profession in its higher branch. His health was so bad in early childhood that it was hardly thought he would survive, and the lameness which after infancy disabled him for a time, remained, though not to a disabling extent, in youth and manhood, to become again a serious trouble in the disorders of his later years. Although always a reader, and fairly if not regularly educated at the High School and University of the Scottish capital, he was in no sense early noted for literary leanings, except that he published a tiny volume of translations from the German at five-and-twenty, and did some ballads a little later—ballads showing something of the rococo style of the late eighteenth

Scott.

century, but with fire enough in them to burn all this up. He married at the end of 1799, and though he never attained, or showed much sign of attaining, an extensive practice, received the easy and comfortable, though not very lucrative, Sheriffship of Selkirkshire, which, with his wife's means and his own, gave him a tolerably good income. In 1802 he put forth, with some original and some contributed matter in verse and prose, the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, and this suggested *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. It was published in 1805, and was in some ways the most important original work in poetry, taking bulk, form, and merit together, that had appeared for generations, though poetically it could not vie with the *Lyrical Ballads*. This masterly metrical romance achieved at a blow the victory for the new poetry, by bringing its charms home to that body of general readers who might have been disposed to think *The Ancient Mariner* a pleasant but extravagant trifle, and to be puzzled or contemptuous over the *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*.

Scott followed up the *Lay* with a series of long poems—*Marmion* (1808), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), *Rokeby* (1812), *The Lord of the Isles* (1813), beside the minor, later, and anonymous *Bridal of Triermain* and *Harold the Dauntless*, not to mention a great number of lesser and chiefly lyrical pieces. He was, though no musician, one of the best song-writers in English, and when he gave up poetry for novel-writing (see next chap.) his magnificent faculty for improvising verse still found vent in mottoes, songs, and snatches included in the novels themselves. The last literary composition of his that is known is in verse, and though, written as it was in all but the final stage of his fatal disorder, it is incoherent in parts, it contains the fine distich—

> The shapes upon the dial cast,
> Proceed but pass not back again;

and ends with the pathetic aposiopesis, strangely appropriate in sense and form—

> The blood glows warm, the nerves expand,
> The stiffened fingers take the pen,
> And——

His career, after the establishment of his fame by *Marmion*, was for nearly twenty years continuously prosperous. In his profession he made no mark, but obtained, in addition to his Sheriffship, a comfortably-paid and not hard-worked appointment in the Court of Session, which, with his other resources, made him independent of literature. And literature itself rewarded him in a way previously unknown. His poems brought him large sums, but these were insig-

nificant in comparison with the returns of the Waverley Novels, which for a long series of years gave an income of from fifteen to twenty thousand a year, and after his death cleared off a balance of debt of about double that amount. He constructed for himself an elaborately Gothic country-house at Abbotsford on the Tweed, bought land round it at exorbitant rates, received the title of baronet in 1820, and, having married his eldest son to an heiress, had every prospect of "founding a family"—his admitted, and not ungenerous, ambition. Unfortunately he had, at an early period, secretly become partner with his friends and printers the Ballantynes in the printing concern itself, and this connection—persevered in for reasons imperfectly comprehensible, since the profits of it were small and the trouble and risk great—resulted in absolute ruin during the great trade crash of 1825. Scott, refusing bankruptcy, set himself to work to pay off in full the enormous sum—over a hundred thousand pounds—for which he was legally liable, and practically achieved the task, but the work and the mental distress brought on paralysis and softening of the brain, from which, after a vain visit to Italy, he died at Abbotsford in 1832.

Scott's poetry, like that of all the more important poets, has to be considered under two aspects, that of its historical position and that of its purely intrinsic merits, though these can never, as some impatient critics have recommended, be wholly separated. From the historic point of view, hardly the greatest poets exceed Scott in importance. Without him it is extremely improbable that Byron would have done anything more than the Giffordian satires, which were most congenial to him, and which, though clever enough, are of no real moment. And without his influence, reinforced as it was a decade later by his own novels and Byron's poems, the complete conversion of the public taste could not, so far as we can see, have by any possibility been effected. Even as it was, the greatest poets of the new school—Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats—had to wait a considerable time for their due acceptance; and if the work had been left to them alone, it is pretty certain that the result would have been slower still, if it had ever been brought about at all. It may be said that the judgment of the multitude in regard to poetry may be neglected, and this is no doubt, to a certain extent, true. But it is very far from unimportant that the general tendency and taste of the time should be turned in a right direction, for then only has poetic genius a fair chance. We may therefore not merely pardon, but welcome, a certain touch of mere popularity, or of artistic imperfection, in triumphant missionaries of the good cause.

Further, the actually weak points of Scott's poetry have for very many years been much exaggerated, and even more misstated.

Although possessed of a poetic faculty always real, often great, and sometimes quite consummate, there is no doubt that he was in the first place, and by natural kind, even more of a tale-teller than of a poet in the modern sense, that he was a "maker" first of all. And for the purpose of tale-telling in verse, extreme and consummate felicity of poetic expression in concentrated form is even less necessary than it is for drama. Indeed, narrative almost discourages such expression, except in the dangerous form of episode or aside. Yet, again, Scott's irregular education and his lack of the minuter critical habit (though he was an excellent, if a rather too merciful, critic on the large scale) made him careless of minor details of phrase, construction, and sometimes rhyme. And yet again, though possessed of deep feeling and of the utmost shrewdness in human philosophy, he was by temperament extremely averse from exhibitions, either of passion or of apparently philosophical reflection. All this gave him the appearance, rather than the reality, of being a superficial and facile bard, and criticism, itself far more really superficial, has sometimes classed him as such.

His poetical quality.

It will readily appear from what has been said in the last paragraph but one that this is a mistake. If the attempts of the four poets above referred to—Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats—some of them composed in direct rivalry with Scott, and in his very measure—be compared, it will be found that the superiority as poetry is by no means constant, and the inferiority as narrative invariable and most marked. Moreover, in the best passages even of his narratives—the finding of the Book in the *Lay*, the last stand at Flodden and the passing bell of Constance in *Marmion*, with not a few others—and still more in his lyrics and snatches,—among which, if mention were once begun, scores of things from "Proud Maisie" downwards would have to be included—Scott constantly reaches a very high level, and sometimes comes not so far off the very best passages of these four poets themselves. Above all, he is one of those poets, the rarest of all, who serve as channels to convey the enjoyment of what is real poetry to those vast numbers of the human race, the majority by something like ninety-nine to one, who are intolerant of poetical quintessence in unadulterated draughts. The benefit conferred by these can hardly be exaggerated.

This "appeal to the people" was taken up before many years had passed by another poet, curiously different from Scott in personal character, and indeed in most other ways, but possessing, like him, the faculty of making poetry popular. George Gordon Byron, sixth Lord Byron, was born in London on 22nd January 1788, the son of John Byron, a captain in the army and a great rascal, and Catherine Gordon of Gicht, an

Byron.

Aberdeenshire heiress. The father squandered the mother's property, and had none of his own, while his uncle, the fifth holder of the title, disposed of or wasted the family estates, so that, despite a long minority, the poet (who succeeded his uncle at ten years old) came into no great fortune. He was educated at Harrow and Cambridge, and in 1807, when not yet twenty, published (after first privately printing) a book of very valueless verse entitled *Hours of Idleness*, which was much ridiculed in the *Edinburgh Review*. Byron, whose satirical faculty is perhaps that which divides his critics the least, replied (not very quickly) in a rough and crude but vigorous satire, following Pope through Gifford, and entitled *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), took his seat, and set out on his travels to the Mediterranean. He came back in 1811 with the two first cantos of *Childe Harold*, and published them in February 1812. The book, which came to a public "ground-baited" to full appetite by Scott, was immensely popular, and Byron became a lion at once of society and literature. In less than four years he had published his brilliant series of verse-tales—*The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Corsair*, *Lara* (1814), *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina* (1815), with other verse—had run through much of his property and sold Newstead Abbey, had married a great heiress, Miss Milbanke, and had, after exactly a year, been left by her. The circumstances, though not even now positively known, were universally assumed to be discreditable to him, and he left England in the spring of 1816, never to return alive. He lived, however, for some seven or eight years longer, chiefly in Italy, and, engaging in the war of Greek Independence, died at Missolonghi on the 19th of April 1824. During these years he produced the last two cantos of *Childe Harold*, far exceeding the earlier ones in poetic force, wrote many pieces in dramatic form, and sometimes, as in *Manfred* and *Sardanapalus*, of much excellence as verse, but of no acting quality, added to his lyrics and shorter pieces (including by far the finest of them, *The Dream* and *Darkness*, written just after the separation), wrote *Mazeppa*, the last and most vigorous of his tales in the Scott style, and engaged in a new kind of satiric writing, the hint of which he took from a very clever writer, J. H. Frere, the companion of Canning in the *Anti-Jacobin*. This vein at first produced *Beppo*, an unimportant though very amusing thing, and then gave the far greater *Don Juan*, a medley, which was not, and perhaps could never have been, finished, but which, though severely reprobated in its own day, and not likely to be ever very sincerely defended on the score of morality, is perhaps his most accomplished work in literary art, displays immense power of observing and "making," and has not a little real poetry.

The chronicle of Byron's poetical reputation is a very important

passage of literary history. As has been said, his popularity, when he first showed his real strength, was immediate and immense; and it continued to increase during his life. Even those who, on political or moral grounds, disapproved, disliked, even detested him, seldom thought otherwise than very highly of his poetical abilities. Moreover, his influence, very great upon the literature of his own country, was almost greater abroad. The new Romantic schools of France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Spain owed nearly as much to him as to any other single influence, perhaps more. Abroad, too, this influence has proved lasting; and if a general vote were taken on the Continent of Europe as to the greatest English poet, it is questionable whether, even after the great revolution which has taken place in foreign taste as to Shakespeare, Byron would not have the first place.

His reputation.

In England, on the other hand, when the first rush of the rocket was over, the fall began at once, and has been, though not as rapid, almost as uninterrupted as the familiar simile suggests. It is true that Byron has never lacked admirers, and that several attempts, the most elaborate and vigorous of these being of recent date, have been made to reinstate, or at any rate to raise, his fame. But whatever may be the case in the future, immediate or other, these attempts have certainly never yet succeeded, either with the majority of competent critics or with the majority of readers of poetry.

No one denies Byron's power of appeal and excitement; nor, now that time has disinfected his work, as usual, is there much necessity for any complaint against him on the score of morality. It is also not denied that he brought into English poetry, and indeed into English literature, a vast and valuable stock of new imagery, new properties, new scenery and decoration; that he employed the verse-tale scheme of Scott, if with no great novelty of form, yet with a novelty and intensity of at least apparent passion which made it quite a different thing. In the same way, in *Manfred* and other pieces, he caught from Goethe, and transformed into his own likeness, a kind of handling of emotion and scenery which was equally unfamiliar. His lyrics, though never possessing the exquisiteness of those of Keats and Shelley, have force and fire, and not uncommonly great sweetness as well; his handling of the Spenserian stanza in *Childe Harold*, though it never attains to the dulcet dreaminess which is the true virtue of that form, has energy, picturesqueness, and a narrative motion very different from that of the original indeed, but for the purpose preferable. *Don Juan*, as has been said, was original, and is still practically almost unique, as a medley of observations on life, tinged with sarcastic innuendo, but not to an extent sufficient to interfere with the milder graces of poetry.

And contribution to English poetry.

Many scattered passages in different poems, dramatic and non-dramatic, possess merits of very high and by no means single or monotonous kind; while once, in the great poem of *Darkness*, Byron has attained to the true sublime, and in the companion *Dream* he has true pathos, unmingled in either case with the merely theatrical. And always he has the merit of changing the scenes, the characters, the temper of English poetry, of at least apparently widening its scope, of giving a dash of the continental, the cosmopolitan, to vary our insularity and our particularism.

If, notwithstanding these allowances, which have been measured with a careful, but not grudging hand, it is still difficult to assign to Byron the highest rank, the cause must be sought outside his minor defects of form, though these are undoubtedly rather numerous and very annoying. Similar defects exist not merely, as has been noted, in Scott, but in many other writers, and they can easily be pardoned. The fault in Byron can be best brought out by the familiar, not easily defined, but easily understood, contrast between rhetoric and poetry. It does not matter much whether the Byronic despair, the Byronic cynicism, Byronism generally, was sincere, as a few boldly maintain; was utterly affected, as others perhaps not much more wisely assert; or was a mixture of nature and affectation. In any case, the mood, and Byron's expression of it, almost invariably seem, to some persons, rhetorical in the bad sense; and rhetoric in the bad sense is of itself, and necessarily, incompatible with the highest poetry.

The two youngest poets of the great English romantic Pléiade stand in less close relation to each other, and to their immediate forerunners, than those who have just been mentioned; and they are much more purely poets of the nineteenth century. In those there is still a very strong eighteenth-century leaven; in these it has altogether disappeared. Their shadow goes wholly forward, except in such very minor matters as Shelley's following of Southey's unrhymed metres, Keats's adoption and improvement of Leigh Hunt's "enjambed" couplet (see below), and a few other things. Percy Bysshe Shelley was born at Field Place near Horsham, in Sussex, on 4th August 1792, being heir to large property and a baronetcy. He was educated first privately, and then at Eton, whence he passed to University College, Oxford. He had already written two worthless romances in the *Monk* style, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, full of crude anarchical ideas borrowed from Godwin and the negative philosophers of the eighteenth century, as well as *The Wandering Jew* (the earlier form of *Queen Mab*), and *Poems by Victor and Cazire*.[1] Later he issued with

Shelley.

[1] Long lost, but recovered, and reprinted by Dr. Garnett, since 1st ed. of this *History*.

T. J. Hogg, who was with him at the University—a clever man, but a treacherous and mischievous friend—yet another volume, *The Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, the mad would-be murderess of George III. In less than a year after he entered Oxford he published a pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism*, and was expelled. On 28th August of the same year he married Harriet Westbrook, a pretty girl, and a school-fellow of his sister's, very young, and of lower station. His later life must be told briefly. He wandered about England and Ireland, tired of his wife, and left her for Mary Godwin, the philosopher's daughter, whom, after Harriet's suicide in December 1816, he married. They had already travelled, and after a brief residence at Marlow, they went to Italy, where he was drowned in a storm off Spezzia on 19th July 1822, having in his later years been a good deal in contact with Byron.

His literary production had been incessant, *Queen Mab*, in 1813, being followed by *Alastor* (1815), *Laon and Cythna*, afterwards *The Revolt of Islam* (1817), *Prometheus Unbound*, and *The Cenci* (1819), *Adonais* (1821), besides many other pieces concurrently with these, which were not published till after his death—*Prince Athanase* (1817), *Rosalind and Helen*, and *Julian and Maddalo* (1818), *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819), *The Witch of Atlas* (1820), *Epipsychidion* and *Hellas* (1821); *The Triumph of Life* (1822). The very numerous smaller poems have, almost from the first, been arranged under the years of their composition.

Shelley's peculiar poetical power is commonly said to have shown itself first in *Alastor;* but it is perfectly visible, to those who have eyes to see, in *Queen Mab*, and it grows ever stronger and stronger, ever brighter and brighter, till his death. *Alastor*, itself a study of the ill effects of solitude, is the best proportioned, and shows the nearest approach to what Shelley never in any long poem gave completely, a piece with a definite scheme definitely carried out. *Prometheus Unbound* is a dream cast in dramatic form, but with hardly any action, and consisting really of a series of the ineffable lyrics which Shelley alone could write. *The Witch of Atlas* is a similar dream, thrown into a form as narrative as the writer could manage; *Adonais*, a following of the Greek elegy, which is really a shrine for separate passages, each of incomparable beauty even for the author. It is here that we find the consummate and characteristic image—

His poems and his poetry.

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of eternity.

And so his other long pieces, and his very numerous shorter lyrics, might be distinguished in different ways.

All, however, are permeated by the same quite indefinable, but easily perceivable, spirit of poetry. The crude atheism of his earlier, and the misty pantheism of his later, years have not very much directly to do with this. His political and social heresies were also more or less accidental; and it is probable that, in a time of triumphant Liberalism, Shelley would have been a high Tory and a mystical devotee. Except, indeed, in reference to the theory of poetry, of which (for his prose was in formal merit not far below his verse) he wrote an admirable *Defence*, his theories on no subject ever took orderly and philosophical form. If we reserve the passion of love, the beauty of nature, and, in his early and earlier middle stages, all revolts against titular and authoritative convention, it can hardly be said that any one subject, or kind of subject, attracted him more than another, or served better than another as canvas for his painting and theme for his music. Except comedy, in which his touch was very uncertain (for of his two efforts of the kind, *Peter Bell the Third* and *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, the first is, in parts, as good as the second is almost entirely bad), there was nothing that he could not touch with the effect of communicating to it his own special poetical enchantment, an enchantment which may be most safely defined as that of indefinite, but haunting suggestion of beauty, in thought sometimes, in sound and visual effect always. On no poet is criticism so unsatisfactory as on Shelley, because in none is the poetry so pure, so independent of subject, so mere a harmony, in the early Greek sense of the word. Analysis of it is nearly impossible, and of little value when it can be made. Eulogy is possible, *ad infinitum;* but for eulogy there is here no space, and the worst utterance of Shelley himself is better worth reading than the best panegyric of his commentators.

John Keats, the second of the pair in age, but the first to die, almost as great a poet as Shelley, and one far more directly in the line of English poetical development, was born in London in October 1795. He was the son of a livery-stable keeper, but had a fair education, was apprenticed to a surgeon, and by no means neglected his profession for seven years. But his real interests were entirely literary; and, as he had some small means, he determined, about the year 1817, to indulge them. He had, not altogether fortunately for himself, made the acquaintance of Hunt and Hazlitt. The first, indeed, taught him the rudiments of a new reformed prosody, while the second may have encouraged his love for our older poetry; but the influence of neither was at all necessary for so original a poet, and while his discipleship to Hunt may have been the cause of a certain over-lusciousness traceable in his earlier work, his friendship with both exposed him (most unjustly, for he had

Keats.

no political creed) to virulent abuse from Tory critics, as a supposed member of the school of Cockney Radicals. His own first book, which does not display anything like his real powers, appeared in 1817. Next year followed the great, though still very immature and unequal, poem of *Endymion*, which had been apparently begun in the Isle of Wight. His health now began to fail, and consumption declared itself unmistakably. He had time, however, to publish, in 1820, a third volume, containing *Lamia*, *Hyperion*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and other things far superior to his earlier work. Then, leaving his betrothed behind him, he set out for Italy, and died at Rome in the care of his friend, the painter Severn, on 13th February 1821. The character of Keats is extremely attractive, and there can be little doubt that, had health and life been granted him, it would have constantly improved. Perhaps this is not quite so likely in regard to his poetry. He could not have improved, nor could any one, on *The Eve*, *The Ode on a Grecian Urn*, and *La Belle Dame sans Merci;* but he could have given us more of them.

His poetical characteristics, though, like those of all the greatest poets, not ponderable or numerable with exhaustive exactness, are easier to indicate than Shelley's. In particular, there is one formal peculiarity which, exuberantly present in *Endymion*, is noticeable in all his work, the return to the highly "enjambed" couplet, which had for a moment fascinated poets like Browne, Wither, and Chamberlayne in the early and middle seventeenth century. Of more importance still is the wide exploration of subject, mediæval, classical, purely fantastic, and miscellaneous, in which Keats, as in other points, was the forerunner of Tennyson, his junior by fourteen years only, and through Tennyson of all English poets since, even of those who have seemed rebel to the influence. This special difference of nineteenth-century poetry will strike us if we compare Keats with Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Gray, in the last of whom the new style appeared dimly, to be more distinctly, but still not quite distinctly, present in the great earlier Romantics from Wordsworth to Scott. The poet presents his own poetic thought and style in the boldest relief, but, in order to do so, he ranges over antiquity and literature in search of subjects which serve him for the stuff, not so much of long narratives, though sometimes also of these, as of shorter lyrical, or quasi-lyrical, outbursts, idylls (or, as Professor Lushington wished to call them, "epylls"), ballads, what not, in which musical and pictorial effect are conjoined, and the conjunction further informed by the poet's own meaning and view.

No poet has ever excelled Keats in this particular style, and no one except Tennyson has equalled him. His genius, at any rate in the still not quite mature condition in which we have it, does not

seem to have tended to the shaping of epic or dramatic work, combining considerable bulk with exact proportion. But for taking an incident, a moment of thought, action, or sentiment, and presenting it vividly to the reader, with the richest assistance of colour, the most haunting accompaniment of verbal music, and something beyond and afar from both these things, though by no means wholly unconnected with them—such things as the poems already mentioned, and others (like the song, "In a drear-nighted December") begin, and very nearly fulfil, the promise of a new poetical era in England. In particular, Keats showed that curious power of entering into the thought and sentiment of other times, which has been so characteristic of our now closing age, and which distinguishes it from all that came before. He knew, it is certain, no Greek; yet the *Ode* above referred to has been accepted by the severest scholars as probably the most Greek thing in English poetry. He could have known extremely little of mediæval literature; yet there is nothing anywhere, even in the far more instructed Pre-Raphaelite School, which catches up the whole of the true mediæval romantic spirit—the spirit which animates the best parts of the Arthurian legend, and of the wild stories which float through mediæval tale-telling, and make no small figure in mediæval theology—as does the short piece of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*.

The new influences were expressed almost as strongly, though with much less immediate influence, by Walter Savage Landor, who is, however, so much more important as a prose-writer, that he will best receive his principal treatment in that class. Yet Landor, a man twenty years older than Keats, began with verse, the curious poem of *Gebir* (1798), which appeared in the very year of the *Lyrical Ballads;* and he never deserted it, his poetical work, in a large variety of forms, being, in fact, one of the most voluminous that any poet of great merit can claim. His tragedy of *Count Julian* has found even fewer admirers than *Gebir;* but the *Hellenics*, and a great body of what may be called Imaginary Conversations in metre, display a very noble, if slightly artificial and inanimate, form of blank verse. Among his innumerable shorter poems (which possess a curious similarity to Ben Jonson's) occur perhaps the best examples (with the doubtful exception of Ben's own masterpieces) of the epigram in the proper Greek sense (that is, the short neat poem on a single thought, incident, person, action, scene) to be found in English. "Dirce" perhaps deserves this description best, while the other peak of Landor's verse, "Rose Aylmer," though less classical, is even more perfectly poetical in its union of colour and music, presenting, or combined with, an exquisite pathos and meaning. Neither in prose nor in verse had Landor any comic power, and even his pathos is not to be calculated upon with any

Landor.

security. But no one has, as he has, united romantic suggestion, atmosphere, perfume, with classical perfection, elegance, limitation of means to the admitted and permitted. And no one possesses quite as he does a certain form of grace, which is rather elegance than grace unqualified.

The first seven poets mentioned in this chapter are wholly, or almost wholly, of the revolt, though Byron affected to play Abdiel to it. Landor has a Janus-face in poetry. But two others, who must not be relegated to the future chapter of minorities, Moore and Campbell, have an indefinable, but very sensible, propulsion towards the older stamp, though not untouched by the newer.

There can, in particular, be no greater contrast to Landor than Thomas Moore, who had little scholarship, and though not "incorrect," carried facility sometimes close to the trivial, but who was an admirable song-writer (Landor's singing was never for the lute, but only for the reader's ear), a satirist in verse of the very first class, and a tale-teller, in the same medium, of great excellence. He was born in Dublin on 28th May 1779, and was the son of a grocer; but was well educated, took his degree, after some political difficulties during that troubled time of "'98," at Trinity College, Dublin, and then went to London to study law at the Middle Temple. His translation of *Anacreon* in 1800, and the *Poems of Thomas Little* next year, made him very popular, though not exactly with the grave and the precise. He was much patronised (though both now and afterwards he managed to retain his independence), and received a valuable appointment in the Bermudas (1803), which gave him no work and some profit, but, through the misconduct of his deputy, involved him later in serious pecuniary liabilities, which were honourably discharged. He produced another volume of poems in 1806, fought a duel with Jeffrey and made friends with him, began the *Irish Melodies* in 1807, and published the *Twopenny Postbag* (the most brilliant political verse since Canning, and the most brilliant political verse in English on the Whig side, except *The Rolliad* and Peter Pindar) in 1812. In 1817 appeared, with immense success even after Scott and Byron, the collection of Oriental-sentimental tales entitled *Lalla Rookh*, and next year a new satiric piece, *The Fudge Family*. His later verse (the chief of it *The Loves of the Angels*, 1823) was, except in small things, not so good, and as he grew older, after the brilliant *Life of Byron* in 1830, he did some book-making (a *History of Ireland*, etc.). But his prose romance of *The Epicurean* (1827) is not contemptible. He was pensioned in 1835, but, like Scott and Southey, suffered in his later days from mental disease. He died at Sloperton in Wiltshire, which had been his headquarters for thirty-five years, in 1852.

Moore.

Moore was somewhat overvalued during his lifetime, and has, as usual, paid the penalty by undeserved depreciation since. It was, indeed, inevitable that the preference on the one hand for "thoughtful" poetry, whether of the style of Wordsworth or of the style of Browning, and on the other for poetry rich in far-brought and far-reaching beauty of suggestion, like that of Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson, should in not very critical minds positively, as well as comparatively, cause distaste for Moore's light and easy songs (hardly separable from the music with which they are associated), for his sparkling *jeux d'esprit* in verse, and for the florid pageantry of *Lalla Rookh* in verse, and *The Epicurean* in prose. But criticism might have been expected to redress the balance of matters, and to remember that nothing can be asked of a man more than to be supreme in his own kind. Moore is supreme, or very nearly so, in his, and that in more kinds than one; yet the fact has too seldom been recognised. Because—as no doubt many, if not most of us, would now—one would rather keep one page of Shelley, and of other poets down to Rossetti, even if the preservation necessitated the loss of all Moore, it does not follow that Moore is despicable.

Three or four things greater than any of Moore's, and a general aspect of higher seriousness, have protected Thomas Campbell against anything like contempt, and will protect him; but his range is less, and his amount of good work very much smaller. He was born in July 1777 at Glasgow, and was educated there. For some time his prospects—his father was a ruined merchant—were unpromising; but he was lucky enough to publish *The Pleasures of Hope* in 1799, when England had little poetry of any kind, and had not yet recognised the *Lyrical Ballads*. Of no great bulk (about 1000 lines of Goldsmithian couplet), nor at all consummate in quality, it was much better than anything of the old kind that any poet then living (except Crabbe, who was for the time silent) could produce, and it made Campbell's fortune. This, maintained fairly by literary work, and never abundant, was always sufficient till his death at Boulogne in 1844. Most of the hackwork which he did is forgotten; but his *Specimens of the British Poets* (London, 7 vols. 1819) are a most valuable *point de repère*, display, not merely critical acuteness, but even remarkable critical catholicity for the time and school, and form the best book of their kind published up to their date, and for many years after. A visit to the Continent in 1800 gave him the material and inspiration of *Hohenlinden*, and his best work was done in the next few years. In 1809 *Gertrude of Wyoming* appeared, in 1824 *Theodric*, and in 1842 *The Pilgrim of Glencoe*. He was for many years editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*. Campbell.

Campbell wrote some half a dozen short things which stand by

themselves — the three great war-songs of *Hohenlinden*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, and *Ye Mariners of England*, "Lochiel," some lines on "A Deserted Garden," which are worth many long poems, and perhaps one or two more. In yet other pieces he showed the poetic flash; but his depth is altogether out of proportion to his width, and most of his work has now merely historical interest. In theory, he set himself against the new school; in practice, all his best things belong to it.

CHAPTER II

THE NOVEL—SCOTT AND MISS AUSTEN

The novel, *c.* 1800-1814—Scott's adoption of it—*Waverley* and its successors—His general achievement—Miss Austen—Miss Edgeworth—Miss Ferrier—Galt—Ainsworth and James—Lord Beaconsfield—Bulwer-Lytton—Others: Lockhart—Peacock—Lever—Marryat—Michael Scott—Hook and others.

THE poetical work of Scott had a great influence on his own time, and he was no mean contributor to that critical and miscellaneous literature which has been so prominent in the nineteenth century. But there can be no doubt that his main importance in literary history comes from his position in the history of the novel, and his accomplishment in more than one kind of it. As will have been partly seen from the foregoing pages, the novel had been making way steadily as a popular form of literature for something like a century. It had produced great practitioners, and, what was even more to the purpose, it had gradually enlisted, more and more, the reading part of the nation. Already, in the middle eighteenth century, we find Gray avowing his partiality for French novels, and Lady Mary devouring English ones in her distant Italian home. The circulating library came by degrees to help its diffusion, and the prevalence of the Terror School and the much-abused "Minerva Press," though neither produced much good literature, helped in both cases to create demand and furnish supply.

The novel, *c.* 1800-1814.

But the novel, despite the great names of Fielding, Smollett, and others, and the rewards which, as in the case of Miss Burney, were now evidently ready for any one who could hit the popular taste in it, still ranked low, and not altogether undeservedly. It was too apt to grovel and maunder in sentiment, or to shriek and gibber in extravagances; no second Fielding had arisen to infuse universality into it, and, at the same time, to keep it close to contemporary life; and though the historical variety of it, after repeated attempts and failures, was becoming popular, no one had in the least succeeded therein. Even a man of such power as Godwin, a professed historian after his

kind, had not succeeded in communicating the least verisimilitude to *St. Leon*, while Mrs. Radcliffe, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, had talked about "the opera" in the Paris of the religious wars. The attempt to defend such things by the anachronisms of Shakespeare is quite inept; for, in the first place, Shakespeare would not have made Hector quote Aristotle, or have introduced Bohemia to the sea, if he had been writing about 1800; and, in the second place, the charms which make us entirely indifferent to these things in Shakespeare are not present in Godwin and Anne Ward.

Scott's adoption of it.

Scott's immediate inducement to turn from verse to prose romance was undoubtedly the popularity of Byron, with his own consequent loss of public favour; but it is not to be believed that the change would in any case have been long postponed. The great attraction of verse is beyond all doubt, though it be varied in a hundred ways, the attraction of the unforeseen; and it is more astonishing that even Scott's genius contrived to keep this up through half a dozen long romances on the same pattern, than that it showed signs of failing at last. The prose romance, though not free from this danger, is very much less exposed to it. The details of form which are most prominent in verse, in prose have no great obviousness, and the subject and treatment can be varied to a far greater extent.

Waverley and its successors.

But Scott was a famous *raconteur* from his youth; he had already made more than one or two attempts at the novel, and when at last he fished *Waverley* out of an old desk, completed it, and published it in the year 1814, it must have been at once evident to alert and competent judges, and it very soon forced itself upon others, that a very new and very important planet had swum into literary ken. The book, the earlier part of which was old work, after a very short time develops an attack which had never been brought to bear before. Scott, who always confessed his obligations, and sometimes out of mere Quixotry invented them altogether, ascribed some to Miss Edgeworth, and the excellent Jane Porter[1] claimed others. But the interesting historical passage of the last Jacobite insurrection was made alive as it had never been made before; the vivid delineations of Scottish scenery, character, and manner hit the English reader as full from their novelty and freshness as they hit the Scotch reader from their truth. And the real secret of the book's success was different. It was that

[1] Jane (1776-1850) and Anna Maria (1780-1832) Porter were sisters, who wrote many novels in a style partly Radcliffian, with more sentiment, more history, and less mystery. The most famous, *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803) and *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810), were Jane's, and undoubtedly preceded *Waverley* in time, but were utterly different in quality.

here, almost for the first time since Fielding (for even Smollett had busied himself more with "humours" and eccentricities), was the true and universal sort of life displayed in this form of literature. The places were real, not the cardboard scenery of a toy theatre; the persons were real, too, not more or less gaudily coloured "characters" thrust on the stage on wooden slides. No fictitious places, except, perhaps, Robinson Crusoe's cave and castle, had presented themselves to the English reader as Tullyveolan did, and the attractions of Tullyveolan were somewhat more advanced than those of the castle and the cave. The Baron, the Bailie, not to mention others, were such persons as only the stage had given previously, and as the stage had hardly given for many generations save at long intervals. Education, reading, wits, might make *Waverley* more delightful; it hardly needed any of them to produce delight.

Scott was not neglectful of the new vein he had discovered. In the ten or twelve years which passed between the publication of *Waverley* and the failure of Ballantyne and Co. he produced, generally in very rapid succession, and as the result of sometimes not more than six weeks', and never more than a few months', work on any single novel, a series in which nearly all the members were masterpieces. The first of these in order were the two great novels, more domestic in tone than *Waverley*, but in the first instance at least chequered by not a little adventure, of *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *The Antiquary* (1816), and another "history," *Old Mortality*. In these three books a consensus of the best judgments has agreed to recognise Scott's very best work, though the charms of the whole are so great and various that selection of any one or two as "best" is difficult and distasteful. *The Black Dwarf*, which appeared with *Old Mortality* in December 1816, was admittedly less happy. But in *Rob Roy* (1817) which followed (the whole of these novels were anonymous, and Scott complicated his anonymity by changing the general titles from "Tales of my Landlord" back to novels "by the author of *Waverley*") a return to a height not far, if at all, below the highest has been generally recognised, while here first, in Die Vernon, Scott achieved a thoroughly attractive heroine. So, too, *The Heart of Midlothian*, 1818 (the second series of the "Tales of my Landlord"), gives a wonderful mixture of pathos in the story of Effie and Jeanie Deans; while some have seen a masterpiece in the tragically ambitious *Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). As to the companion with which the *Bride*, like *Old Mortality*, was supplied, *A Legend of Montrose*, the completeness and excellence of its action have generally been granted, and there is no greater favourite than Dugald Dalgetty with some of Scott's most faithful lovers.

Hitherto Scott had confined himself entirely to his native country.

He now (1819) left it altogether, and took the times of Cœur de Lion in England for his subject in *Ivanhoe*. Some petty objections of the pedantic kind have been taken by historians to his details, but of the very high merit of the book, as a whole, there can be little doubt. It was the first book to show the immense advantages of the Middle Ages for prose fiction, and the happiest. The two novels which followed, and which are connected in subject, *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* (both 1820), returned to Scotland in the times of Queen Mary; but the first, which attempted the supernatural in a rather half-hearted way, was and is thought less of a success than the second, where the escape from Lochleven, with all the scenes leading up to it, the brilliant picture of Edinburgh under Murray, and the figure of Catherine Seyton, rank with Scott's best things. Then followed *Kenilworth* (January 1821), a book of the greatest brilliancy, variety, and pathos; *The Pirate* (December 1821), in which Scott, with one of his special turns of genius, has fixed the scenery and characteristics of the Shetland Islands for ever in his readers' minds; *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), with its incomparable picture of James I. and its sketch of Whitefriars; and *Peveril of the Peak* (1823), where the opportunity of the Popish Plot is not quite so happily taken. But, in the same year with *Peveril* and in the next, that astonishing variety which was Scott's chief characteristic was shown by three other books of wonderful goodness and variety—*Quentin Durward*, a novel of foreign historical adventure which hardly comes behind his very best; *St. Ronan's Well*, a return to the domestic model of *The Antiquary*, but with more tragic touches and a more modern tone, which, had its end not been spoilt by deference to injudicious advice, would have been far more really tragic than *The Bride of Lammermoor;* and *Redgauntlet*, which would be the equal of the best of all were it not for a certain incoherence of construction and inequality of parts, but which is of hardly excelled interest in many ways, being partly autobiographical, and enshrining the marvellous "Wandering Willie's Tale." A little before the beginning of the end, in July 1825 (the smash following in January 1826), he published the two "Tales of the Crusaders," *The Talisman*, a capital, *The Betrothed*, a more questioned, example of his skill.

He had no further opportunity to compose fiction with untroubled mind, and first the labour of his *Life of Napoleon*, then illness ever increasing, and the revision of the whole set of novels for a new annotated edition, left him not much time for it. Yet the best things at least of *Woodstock* (1827) and *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828) are very little below his happiest; the minor "Chronicles of the Canongate" have an introduction, couched in the form of fiction and

of exquisite beauty, and *Anne of Geierstein* (1828-29) is better than most critics allow. When *Count Robert of Paris*, and still more when *Castle Dangerous* was written, softening of the brain had certainly set in; yet even here there are things that no one before Scott, and few after him, can match.

General comment on Scott's novel-work can only be presented here in a rigidly limited summary. He created the historical novel, after some thousand years of unsuccessful attempt. He first showed how national character, national dialect, national characteristics generally, could be made, not as the drama had already made them, implements in burlesque and interlude, but a main "colour," a substantive element, in the interest of fiction. He added to the gallery of imaginary personages more and greater figures than had been added by any one except Shakespeare. He did what even Shakespeare had been prevented by his medium of communication from doing with equal fulness—he provided a companion gallery of landscape and "interior" such as had never been known before. And partly by actual example, partly by indication and as harbinger, he showed the possibility of kinds of novel quite different from those which he most commonly practised himself. He found the class still half-despised, very scantily explored, popular, but with a sort of underground and illicit popularity. He left it the equal of any literary department in repute, profit, possibility; and (which must be said, though it is travelling out of our usual record) he infused into it, as Fielding had begun to do before him, a tradition of moral and intellectual health, of manliness, of truth and honour, freedom and courtesy, which has distinguished the best days of the English novel as it distinguishes those of hardly any other literary kind.

His general achievement.

While Scott was thus indicating almost all the possible lines of fiction, and following some of them out with astonishing thoroughness and success, a lady, not much his own junior but destined to a much shorter life than his, was achieving hardly less real success in others, especially those which he touched least. Jane Austen, daughter of the rector of Steventon in North Hampshire, was born there in December 1775. She was well educated, but lived all her life in the country or in country towns, especially Bath, Southampton, and the village of Chawton close to Alton. She died unmarried, in middle life, at Winchester, on 18th July 1817. She had begun to write quite early, well before the end of the eighteenth century, but she found no publisher, and her actual first book, *Northanger Abbey*, though bought by one in 1797, did not appear till after her death. In 1811, however, *Sense and Sensibility* was issued, and was followed by *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813 (both

Miss Austen.

had been written nearly as early as *Northanger Abbey*). *Mansfield Park* appeared in 1814, and *Emma* two years later. *Persuasion*, her last completed work, was published the year after her death with *Northanger Abbey*, the first begun. She also left a few fragments, but nothing of any importance; nor are her letters, which were published many years later by Lord Brabourne in 1884, of the first interest, though they illustrate agreeably enough some of the characteristics and atmosphere of the novels. The squirearchy and the upper professional class, especially in the country, supplied her with the materials of a set of books which, though not startling or imposing, have from the very date of their appearance impressed all the best judges, of the most diverse tastes, as among the very best things in prose fiction.

The first thing noticeable in these novels is that the last vestige of the usual romantic character has disappeared. There is an elopement, but no abduction. The first book, *Northanger Abbey*, turns in great part on good-natured raillery of the Terror School; the scheme, characters, events, are strictly (some palpitating souls seem indeed to find them ruthlessly and crushingly) ordinary. The rest of the interest of *Northanger Abbey* itself turns on the adventures of a pretty and fairly clever girl at Bath, and at the house of a tyrannical general, who, mistaking her for an heiress, invites her, pays her extravagant court in hopes that she will marry his son, and practically turns her out of doors when he finds his error. *Sense and Sensibility* contrasts the fates of two sisters, one impulsive, one sedate, who have lost their father, and are left in narrow circumstances, but with many rich and some not unkind relations and friends. *Pride and Prejudice*, the author's masterpiece (which had, like the *Lyrical Ballads*, been written in 1797), is the history of a high-spirited girl who rejects the offers of a rich and important personage because of his disrespect to her family; *Mansfield Park*, that of a penniless damsel brought up among her rich cousins; *Emma*, by some exalted to the first place, that of an heiress a little spoilt by her position; *Persuasion*, that of a younger daughter of a good family who allows herself to be "put upon" by her family and friends. The average eighteenth-century novel had never dared to appear without a good or wicked lord; Miss Austen scarcely mentions any one above the rank of a baronet. The eighteenth century had been faithful to its Aristotle as it understood him, and to its revolutions and discoveries. In Miss Austen there are no discoveries of any but the mildest importance, and hardly any but rose-water and rose-leaf revolutions.

Yet, simple as are the plots, they are worked out with extraordinary closeness and completeness, and the characters and dialogue

are of such astonishing *finesse* and life that it would hardly matter if there were no plot at all. From first to last this hold on life never fails Miss Austen, nor does the simple, suggestive, half-ironic style in which she manages to convey her meaning. Not even Scott's or Thackeray's characters dwell in the mind more securely than John Thorpe, the bragging, babbling undergraduate in *Northanger Abbey*, and the feather-brained, cold-hearted flirt, his sister Isabella; than the Bennet family in *Pride and Prejudice*, every member of which is a masterpiece, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the arrogant lady patroness, and Mr. Collins her willing toady; than Mrs. Norris, half sycophant, half tyrant, in *Mansfield Park;* than the notable chatterer Miss Bates in *Emma*. Miss Austen's portraiture is distinctly satirical, it has even been accused of a touch of cruelty; but this only gives flavour and keeping quality. The best points of her handling, indeed—her Addisonian humour, her almost Fieldingian life—she could not communicate. But she showed once for all the capabilities of the very commonest and most ordinary life, if sufficiently observed and selected, and combined with due art, to furnish forth prose fiction not merely that would pass, but that should be of the absolutely first quality as literature. She is the mother of the English nineteenth-century novel, as Scott is the father of it.

The example, however, of her style was not by any means at once followed, and though, about ten years after the appearance of *Waverley*, imitations of Scott became common, nothing of real excellence in the kind was produced for many years more. The coming importance, however, of fiction in the literature of the century was shown by the almost simultaneous uprising of practitioners of many different kinds of novel. We must note at least Miss Edgeworth, Miss Ferrier, Galt, Harrison Ainsworth, G. P. R. James, Bulwer—to use the name by which the first Lord Lytton gained and kept his popularity as a novelist — Peacock, and Lord Beaconsfield, adding, perhaps, a paragraph of minorities.

Miss Edgeworth.

Of the two ladies first mentioned, who played, for Ireland and Scotland respectively, the part played for England by Miss Austen, though with less intensity of genius and less universality, Miss Edgeworth was the elder. She was born in 1767, her father being a clever but vain and odd man who married many wives, championed many crotchets, wrote a good deal, and did not improve his daughter's books by meddling with them. Besides many quite admirable stories of and for children, which contain work equal to the best parts of her regular novels, Miss Edgeworth produced *Castle Rackrent* (1801), an Irish story, or rather study of manners; *Belinda* (1803), dealing with society in London; *The Absentee* and *Ormond*, the two best of her purely Irish novels, and others down to

Helen in 1834. She died in 1849. She enjoys the very high honour of being admitted as in part his original by Scott, and it is undoubtedly true that, with the exception of a few Scotch touches in Smollett, national characteristics had seldom been introduced into imaginative work except for purposes of burlesque. Besides her knowledge of her countrymen, Miss Edgeworth had a very fair grasp of humanity generally, much humour, and at her best a light and easy style. But, partly under the direct influence of her father, she was apt to infuse into her work too much moralising, after the French eighteenth-century pattern; she had no power of managing plot, and even in dialogue and character she will lapse from good to bad, from brilliancy to dulness, with a suddenness irritating and almost incomprehensible. She is thus better in short stories than in long ones.

Miss Ferrier.

Susan Ferrier, on the other hand, who was born in 1782, and did not die till 1854, attempted nothing but long novels, and only three of these. She was the daughter of an Edinburgh Writer to the Signet, a friend of Sir Walter's, and was aunt to the philosopher Professor Ferrier. It seems to have been with a good deal of misgiving that she put together the series of sketches (for it is hardly a connected novel) called *Marriage* (1818); but it was warmly received and deserved the reception, though it is a very odd compound of a sentiment-novel *à la* Mackenzie and a series of satiric sketches, sometimes as vigorous as Smollett, and not without touches of extreme severity. Her next and best novel, *The Inheritance*, still preserves the compound, but the texture of the book is closer, and the humorous pictures—Lord Rossmore, Miss Pratt the busybody, Uncle Adam (an audacious taking-off of the author's father), Miss Bell Black, *évaporée* and idiot, and others—gain in width of stroke and brilliancy of colour. *Destiny*, the third, falls back rather to the conditions of *Marriage*, being a long and rather disjointed chronicle with a good deal of sentiment and only occasional strokes of humour. But Miss Ferrier's best things have high distinction, the general Scotch quality being original (for neither Scott nor Galt had written when she wrote *Marriage*) and well blended with the author's own sarcastic observation.

Galt.

John Galt completes the trio, for though the "Ettrick Shepherd" wrote novels, they came later, and are, with the exception of the strange and striking *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, of much less importance. He was born in May 1779 at Irvine, in Ayrshire, and died at Greenock in April 1839. Galt was a man of business and a public servant, who at one time had the prospect of a great future as manager of the Canada Company. But, not it would seem by any fault of his own, he was unlucky, and died with broken fortunes. He had both travelled and written a

great deal; but of his abundant work nothing but his novels, and not the whole of these, has survived. He is known by *The Ayrshire Legatees*, *The Annals of the Parish*, *Sir Andrew Wylie*, *The Entail*, and *The Provost*. The first of these is one of the numerous imitations of *Humphrey Clinker*, and the third a sort of fantasy-piece, amusing both as he meant it to be and as he did not. But *The Annals*, *The Entail*, and *The Provost* exhibit the humours of Scottish life in the country and in small towns at the beginning of the century with very great talent, and even some genius of a limited and peculiar kind. Galt's dialect is more distinctly local and peculiar than Scott's, and his literary faculty is not to be named in the same breath. But if less universal, he is perhaps even more racily particular.

Ainsworth and James.

Two pairs may follow—Ainsworth and James, Disraeli and Bulwer. William Harrison Ainsworth, the son of a Manchester lawyer, was born in 1805; George Payne Rainsford James four years earlier, the son of a London physician. But Ainsworth long outlived James (who died as consul at Venice in 1860), and did not himself die till 1882, having written till a short time before his death. The flourishing time of both was the second quarter of the century, at the very beginning of which Ainsworth started with *Sir John Chiverton* (1825), which, however, it is said, he did not write alone; James with *Richelieu* (1829). Neither was a man of strictly literary power, though James was the superior of Ainsworth as a writer, and did some respectable work in other departments besides the novel. But both have been rather absurdly depreciated of late. All their best works were published before the middle of the century.

Lord Beaconsfield.

The second pair rises higher. Benjamin Disraeli was born in London on 31st December 1804, being the son of the ingenious miscellanist and antiquarian writer, Isaac Disraeli. He was privately educated, and intended for the law, but turned very early to literature. He was not yet of age, nor the author of *Vivian Grey*, when he negotiated on Murray's part with Lockhart for the setting up of the *Representative* newspaper, which proved a costly failure. *Vivian Grey* itself, his first novel, was published next year (1826), and was followed, before Disraeli succeeded in getting into Parliament in 1837, by other novels or novelettes, *Captain Popanilla*, *The Young Duke*, *Contarini Fleming*, *Alroy*, the florid but really passionate and beautiful love-story of *Henrietta Temple*, and the interesting working-up of Byron's life called *Venetia*. The most characteristic and brilliant, however, of his novels came afterwards, when he was already on the eve of political leadership—*Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred*

(1847). The later *Lothair* (1870) and *Endymion* (1880) are chiefly asides and pastimes written to beguile the leisure of Opposition.

Just as no one, either during his life or since, has ever quite known what to make of Lord Beaconsfield in himself, so no one has ever quite known what to make of his books. Their brilliant and astonishing cleverness is not denied by any competent critic; few question the wit (only wanting Heine's passion to be, like Heine's, humour as well) which suffuses them; not many persons of any imagination or even fancy have failed to be fascinated by the fantastic play of invention, the restless fertility of thought and image and innuendo, with which they abound. On the other hand, not many sound critics would deny that their sentiment is often questionable; that their taste in other ways invites the epithets, tawdry, rhetorical, gaudy; that they sometimes sin by personality; and that, except in small things like *Ixion* and *The Infernal Marriage*, or in *Henrietta Temple*, they can never be said finally and fully to reach success in the kind to which they seem to wish to belong. But the steady progress between *Vivian Grey* and *Venetia*, and the vigour of the great political trio which follows, may be thought to show that, if their author had not merged his literary interests in a more exciting game, he might have done even better. No great literature has ever been produced as a *parergon* unless it was trifling in bulk; and latterly, if not from the first, Disraeli's literary work was always a *parergon*.

Bulwer-Lytton.

The first Lord Lytton, earlier known as Bulwer or Bulwer-Lytton (he was a younger son of the Bulwers of Norfolk, and representative through his mother of the Lyttons of Hertfordshire), was a slightly older man, born in 1803 (?). He was educated at Cambridge, where he obtained the Chancellor's Medal for English verse, a form for which he always had some hankering, while he was also a dramatist of more accomplishment than most of his century, and a writer of most kinds of prose. His public life began almost as early as his literary career, for he sat in the unreformed Parliament. In 1835 he was made a Baronet. He began life as a Whig, but gradually became more Conservative in his opinions, and ranked in that party for the greater part of his life. He was Colonial Secretary in 1858, and died in 1873, having been raised to the peerage some years before.

His first novel, *Falkland*, was published anonymously in 1827; his second, *Pelham*, appeared with his name, and though it can hardly be called a great book, made, and has to some extent kept, mark as one of the first of fashionable or dandy novels. Carlyle's severe satire on it in *Sartor Resartus* is itself a tribute to the effect the book produced, if not also to some intrinsic quality in it. It was followed by a long series of novels in many different styles, the

versatile quality of Bulwer's talent being sensible to the slightest veering of popular taste. If hardly one of these novels can be called a masterpiece, there is also hardly one which does not display cleverness in a very high degree, and it is by no means certain that books like *Ernest Maltravers*, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and *Harold* may not have more than one return of the popularity which, indeed, has not even yet been exchanged for complete oblivion. This versatility was shown in still more remarkable fashion when, about the middle of the century, the novelist completely abandoned the terror-novel, the sentimental novel, the historical novel, and all the rest, turned to the domestic kind which was then becoming fashionable, and produced in *The Caxtons*, *My Novel*, and *What will he do with it?* books which attained a great reputation, and have been dethroned rather by things different than by better things. In yet a third period, from 1860 to his death, Bulwer displayed this almost unique faculty of trimming his sails once more, writing wonder-stories of a new kind in the *Strange Story* and the consummate *The Haunted and the Haunters*, fantastic romances of the future in *The Coming Race*, pictures of actual contemporary life, as fresh as those of his youth, in *Kenelm Chillingly*. There never was the slightest sign of exhaustion in him, and it is scarcely an extravagance to say that however long he had lived, and whatever changes of taste, fashion, thought he had seen, he would always have been equal to the task of reflecting them in fiction as he had already done for nearly half a century. The Nemesis of such literary prestidigitation is almost invariably and necessarily a want of depth and intensity; and no doubt this is to be found in Bulwer. It is a minor matter, but one also unfortunate for him, that he acquired at first, and therefore, even with his gifts for quick change, could never wholly lose, the insincere high-flown Byronic style which, after impressing for a decade or two, became the laughing-stock of many decades more. The taste for this may not impossibly return, and if so, the popularity of Bulwer may return with it; but it is improbable that this revival will extend to more than a part of his work.

It is hard to draw the line between those novelists who deserve independent mention and those who must be dealt with in batches. Not a few of the writers in this period, who found their real vocation elsewhere, were novelists occasionally—a fact which is always a valuable literary and historical indication of the growing popularity of a kind. James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, it has been said, wrote novels; Leigh Hunt wrote novels; even Moore, in his prose tale of *The Epicurean*, approached the style. De Quincey and Wilson, whose proper sphere was essay-writing, tried prose fiction; and there was a time

Others: Lockhart.

(1821-25) when Wilson's colleague, Lockhart, seemed to be likely to devote himself wholly, or at least mainly, to it. But Lockhart's four novels, *Reginald Dalton*, *Valerius*, *Adam Blair*, and *Matthew Wald*, while showing the great literary faculty and the unusual powers of mind which their author possessed, showed also that novel-writing was not his vocation. *Reginald Dalton* is indeed one of the first examples of the University novel, and *Valerius* one of the very first attempts to apply to classical times the processes which, in Scott's hands, had been so effective in mediæval and modern. But in both cases Lockhart "was not the magician." He came nearer to success in the intense and powerful novelette of *Adam Blair*, but this is rather a single situation than a complete story; and *Matthew Wald*, a novel of madness, is almost a failure.

But the time, though not so fertile as that of our concluding Book, was fertile in men who devoted themselves with more or less success to the kind. The greatest of these from the literary side, though perhaps he can hardly be called a great novelist, was undoubtedly Thomas Love Peacock, who was born in 1785, became a scholar of no mean order without any regular education, and a high official in the East India Company, without either entering its service early or devoting himself to any profession, lived to a great age, and died in 1866. One of Peacock's novels, *Gryll Grange*, belongs to almost the latest period of this history, to the time when, in retirement, he looked out, with no senile petulance but with his old sardonic attitude, on a world more changed from that of his youth than that of his youth was from the days of Addison or even Dryden. But most of his fiction, *Headlong Hall*, *Melincourt*, *Nightmare Abbey*, *Maid Marian*, *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, and *Crotchet Castle*, belongs to the time between Waterloo and the first Reform Bill. These exhibit, as does *Gryll Grange* thirty years later, a satirical mood, not exactly that of the bookworm but certainly that of the man of letters, towards all popular cants and follies of the political, social, and literary kind. Peacock was a friend of Shelley, and in his earlier books he is singularly unjust to the Lake poets; not, it would seem, owing to political prejudice, though there was in him then something of this, but from a survival of eighteenth-century and slightly Voltairian impatience of some forms of romance. He himself, however, was clearly enough a romantic writer with classical varnish, and with a stronger *clinamen* towards the Aristophanic than towards the Aeschylean temper. He wrote good verse; and good is too weak a word for his songs, especially his convivial songs, which are among the very best in literature. But his proper literary dialect was prose, especially (though he was a master of description) ironic dialogue and comment of a kind peculiar to himself. That it had

Peacock.

much influence on Thackeray there can be no doubt at all. But Peacock was always nearer to wit than to humour, though in some of the outlying kinds of the latter, notably in that which animates *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, he was a very great master.

Lever.

In Charles Lever, who was born in 1806, and who, writing novels indefatigably from about his thirtieth year, entered the consular service, and died consul at Trieste in 1872, there was some resemblance to Bulwer—not indeed in tone or temper, but in knowledge of the world, and in the facility with which he successively adopted quite different styles of writing, to suit the public taste. Lever, who was an Irishman by birth, a member of Trinity College, Dublin, and by profession a physician, had accumulated vast stores of anecdote; and he began to pour these out, with very little arrangement, in the "rollicking" books of which *Harry Lorrequer* and *Charles O'Malley* are the chief. After a time he changed his scenes chiefly to the Continent, and made a great advance in the method of his novels; while for some years before his death he almost entirely abandoned the modern-picaresque style which he had so long pursued, and attempted, not without success, a more sober and careful study of ordinary life and manner. But it is probably by his military and Irish extravaganzas that he will live, if he does live.

Marryat.

Frederick Marryat played, but much more thoroughly, the same part towards the navy that Lever occupied towards the army. He was born in 1792, saw much service even after the overthrow of Napoleon, and having obtained post rank, distinguished himself specially in the first Burmese war. Then he turned to the press, not merely writing but editing for many years, and latterly attempting to farm his own land in Norfolk, not with success. His series of naval novels, from *Frank Mildmay* onwards, is perhaps the most remarkable instance of a man working his professional knowledge with effect in literature. The mere writing is frequently careless, and the construction, as usual at this period, exceedingly haphazard. But the character-studies, if rather external, are constantly vivid and true, the adventures are often exciting and always amusing, and some of the books, especially *Peter Simple* and *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, are not likely soon to grow obsolete.

Michael Scott.

The only other naval novels worth mentioning here are the two remarkable books of Michael Scott, a man of whom very little is known, but who contributed *Tom Cringle's Log* and *The Cruise of the Midge* to *Blackwood*. If Marryat has little plot, Scott has none at all; but he had, what Marryat had not, a command of elaborate picturesque style which, like that of his perhaps master, Christopher North, sometimes passes

into the grandiloquent and bombastic, but at its best is very impressive.

We can hardly do more than mention Charles Robert Maturin (1782-1824), whose powerful *diablerie* of *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) has never ceased to fascinate some readers in each generation; Theodore Hook, the fun-maker of the third and fourth decades of the century, before Dickens, and long before Thackeray appeared—a man whose talents, amounting very nearly to genius, are vouched for by strong testimony, but can hardly be said to appear in his books save in shreds and patches; Mrs. Gore, a very clever writer of fashionable and other novels; or the authors of a considerable number of single books, like the *Anastasius* of Thomas Hope, the *Hajji Baba* of James Morier, and the *Frankenstein* of Mrs. Shelley, which survive by reputation, and even to a certain extent by reading. And this remark may serve even more with regard to the corresponding chapter in the next Book, where an even larger number of such books and authors would claim attention if it were accorded to any of their number. The lesser dramatists of the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, the lesser poets of the eighteenth, the lesser novelists of the nineteenth, have to pay a penalty which is as just as it is inevitable. They form part of great regiments, almost of corporate bodies, in which their individuality is lost. But for the greater men they probably would never have written; and they must be content to be represented by them

Hook and others.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW ESSAY

Progress and defects of the earlier essay—Magazines and Reviews—The *Edinburgh:* Jeffrey—Its contributors: Scott's criticism—Brougham—Sydney Smith—The *Quarterly*—The new Magazine—*Blackwood's:* "Christopher North"—Lockhart—The *London*—Lamb—Leigh Hunt—Hazlitt—De Quincey—Landor's prose—Cobbett.

DESPITE the mighty work of Scott and the exquisite accomplishment of Miss Austen, it may be doubted whether the novel is the chief special feature in prose of the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. That position belongs rather to the new developments of the essay, which were fostered, and indeed rendered possible, by the increased demand for periodical literature. We have seen how the essay, unknown by name and not much known in fact before the end of the sixteenth century, had already tended to include all subjects for prose treatment in its province; how it absorbed the Character, developed further its own special vein of egotistic meditation, asserted in Dryden's hands the proper place of literary criticism, became in those of the Steele-Addison group the rival, and the successful rival, of the drama and the sermon as the popular form of reading, and maintained that position well through the eighteenth century.

Progress and defects of the earlier essay.

In these two centuries it had already touched nearly every subject, and had been written by the most eminent hands; but its general organisation had been defective. In the seventeenth century it had had to appear as an independent book, as a pamphlet, or at best as a preface to something else. Even the essay-periodicals of the eighteenth were anything but perfect in method. To give themselves a countenance as well as a frame and platform, they had to affect artificial devices which hampered more than they helped, and soon palled on public taste. They depended either on individuals of genius, or on a fortuitous and unstable combination of individuals of talent, and so could never last.

Magazines and Reviews.

It is true that periodicals of something like the modern scheme did exist—the famous *Gentleman's Magazine* as early as 1731, the scarcely less famous *Critical* and *Monthly Reviews* a little later.[1] But they enjoyed little reputation or circulation; they were mostly written for wretched pay by always needy and sometimes unscrupulous hacks. There was a suspicion of discredit about periodical writing which even the participation in it of men like Smollett did not remove; nor does it appear that these papers, at any rate the two *Reviews*, would have given any welcome to the sprouts of an outsider's brain, even if he had offered them for nothing.

The Review, however, was to be reorganised sooner than the Magazine, and even before the new form of magazine was provided by the *London* and *Blackwood*, the daily papers served as hosts and introducers to a good deal of original and critical work of the essay kind. There is no doubt that the main credit, if not of actually launching, of carrying safe to sea, the *Edinburgh Review*, the first of the new fleet of periodicals, is due to Francis Jeffrey, who with Sydney Smith and others planned and began the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, while after the first number he was its sole editor. Jeffrey was born in Edinburgh on 23rd October 1773, was educated at the High School and University there as well as at Glasgow, and for a short time at Oxford, and was called to the Scottish bar. Despite his addiction to literature he never gave up his practice, and though not at first successful, gradually made himself a name. When his party at last came into power after the Reform Bill, he was made Lord Advocate, became a Judge, and died in 1850, having for nearly twenty years given up all but a consultative connection with the management of the *Review*. But for the first thirty years of its life he was, except in cases of contributors like Sydney Smith, who were too valuable to be lost and too independent to be driven, all-powerful; and there is no doubt that he directly and indirectly influenced a great branch of literature as few others have done. His own critical work has been variously, and since his death for the most part unfavourably, estimated. That he was both prejudiced in extra-literary matters, and somewhat uncatholic in literary matters proper, cannot be denied. But he had a real knowledge of English literature, a creed too narrow indeed, but not so narrow as is sometimes thought, and within the blinkers of that creed a very sharp and steady vision.

The *Edinburgh*: Jeffrey.

Jeffrey's associates at first included even Scott, for the extreme

[1] The distinction of these titles was no doubt intentional, and though the sharp division has been lost it still exists to some extent. The *Review* proper is nothing if not critical; the *Magazine* is more of a miscellany, and began early to serve as a vehicle for prose fiction.

Whig principles which were afterwards to distinguish the *Review* were not at once asserted, at least exclusively, nor was reviewing by any means the least of Sir Walter's accomplishments, though his critical and miscellaneous writings are far too little read now. He was not an adept in the minor branches of criticism, and he was perhaps rather too universally good-natured, though this is a much better fault in a critic than universal ill-nature. But his sense of the general principles of literature, and not merely imaginative literature, was extremely sound, his wide reading enabled him to illustrate his articles in a manner both useful and amusing, and his very narrative faculty came in for the purpose of making the article a unity, instead of the heap of disjointed observations which is sometimes put forward. Its contributors: Scott's criticism.

Only one other of the individual contributors to the *Review* could pretend to very high literary qualities. Professors Playfair and Leslie were respectable pundits in their different lines; Francis Horner, a man who died too young to disparage the praises of his friends, was a political economist of some solidity. It is less easy to designate briefly the once eminent and still conspicuous, if rather enigmatic, figure of Henry Brougham, who raised himself with little aid but his own talents to the Lord Chancellorship of England, wrote on every subject, was at first dreaded, then distrusted, and finally disregarded, by every party, passed from almost the highest position in Parliament as a debater to the leadership of "Pantopragmatical" Social Science congresses and the like, lived to a great age, and is now never read save out of curiosity. He was of an old and good Westmoreland family, but was born in Edinburgh (1778), was wholly educated there, and was to all intents and purposes much more of a Scot than of an Englishman. His once brilliant political career, and its warnings, do not concern us; and his contributions to literature had little solidity, permanence, or even temporary attraction, beyond that of a forcible-flashy style, well enough adapted for the debate and the newspaper, but unsuitable for the book. But he was a valuable, if sometimes a very troublesome, "contributor," ready to write, and write effectively enough, on any subject, in any space, at any notice. Brougham.

Sydney Smith, though a professed jester, stands far above Brougham, far above all the other contributors but Scott, and a good deal above his coadjutor and successor in the editorship. He was almost the only Englishman on the original staff of the *Edinburgh*, and it may have been the characteristics of that staff (he never seems to have known Scott much) which pointed a certain famous remark of his about Scotsmen and jokes. He himself is almost the only man on record who has established a high Sydney Smith.

and secure reputation in literature by joking merely. For with him wit and humour were not, as with Aristophanes, or Shakespeare, or Molière, or Swift, or even with men like Congreve, means to an end. He had, indeed, strong political, religious, and other views, but they never reached the dignity of principles. He might just as well have been on the other side, and, as his later work shows, would pretty certainly have been there had he been born a generation earlier or later. The volleys of his wit required some object, and they found it in Tory abuses, "Catholic" disqualification, the Methodists, spring-guns, etc.; but the battery would have played just as well on democracy and universal suffrage. Everything presented itself to Sydney as a joke actual or possible, and yet (for this is his highest glory) he is never a mere jack-pudding. And so the very Liberal *Letters of Peter Plymley*, early in his literary life, and the very Conservative *Letters to Archdeacon Singleton* at the end of it, with his *Edinburgh* articles, his letters and everything that he wrote, have obtained, and are likely to keep, a high place in literature. His ridicule is no test of truth; it is possible to enjoy it to the very full, and yet believe heartily in all or most of the things he laughed at. But if it has no force to destroy, it has infinite force to preserve itself. Sydney Smith was born in 1771, was educated at Winchester and Oxford, took orders, made his way to Edinburgh as a tutor, removed to London after his marriage, and for the greater part of his life was a country clergyman at Foston in Yorkshire and Combe Florey in Somerset. After the triumph of the Whigs he received a canonry at St. Paul's, and died in February 1845.

The foundation, seven years later, of the *Quarterly Review* rather extended the field and varied the politics of this new kind of essay-writing than added any great new practitioners of it, with perhaps one exception. This was Southey, who, always a working man of letters, had from his first literary beginnings worked (usually for wretched pay) in such reviews as were open to him, though he had on principle refused to contribute to the *Edinburgh*. With the *Quarterly*, which was expressly founded to defend Church and State, he had no such scruples, and for some quarter of a century it was at once one of his chief sources of revenue and the principal outlet of his miscellaneous writing. Scott, who had been disgusted with the *Edinburgh* politics, and seriously disobliged (in the case of *Marmion*) by the *Edinburgh* criticism, transferred his services to the new paper, which was edited by Gifford, and enjoyed the support of the Old Guard of the *Anti-Jacobin* (*vide supra*, p. 596) from Canning downwards, together with all the more promising recruits, especially from the English universities, on the Tory side. These two periodicals, representing

The *Quarterly*.

the two great parties and amply furnished with literary ability, took solid place at once, and for many years continued to be the head-quarters of serious discussion on politics, literature, religion, philosophy, and things in general. But they observed with even more strictness than their less distinguished predecessors the meaning of the word *Review*. They admitted no compositions of a fantastic or fictitious kind ; they only quoted verse ; and though their articles might sometimes use the books noted as what is called a "peg" to hang the reviewer's own views upon, yet such a peg was, as it is still, a *sine qua non* with them.

The new Magazine.

The distinction between a Magazine and a Review was, as observed above, an old one, though the periodicals of the *Spectator* class had to some extent confounded the two. But the characters were mixed, though the name Magazine was preferred, in two publications, the *London Magazine* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, which at very nearly the same moment, in 1817, introduced a yet new kind of periodical, and served as the means for introducing a very large amount of new literary talent, and in some cases genius, to the world. For twenty years previous to 1817 such talent and (as in the notable case of Coleridge) such genius had been finding outlets in daily papers like the *Times* and the *Morning Post*, in weekly papers such as Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*, in refashioned imitations of the *Spectator*, such as his *Indicator* and *Reflector*. But the two remarkable monthly magazines named above came into existence in apparently the most haphazard manner—really, no doubt, because they were wanted, and had to be provided somehow. *Blackwood's*, the longest-lived by far, had a most unfortunate start, and was very near being a failure altogether, when it was completely revolutionised by a crew of brilliant wits, and launched afresh with the daring lampoon of the "Chaldee Manuscript" ; the *London* was more homogeneous throughout, but its career was very short, though almost without parallel brilliant.

Blackwood's : "Christopher North."

The men who came to the aid of Mr. William Blackwood, an Edinburgh publisher who combined enterprise and judgment in a most singular fashion, were first of all John Wilson, afterwards Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, and John Gibson Lockhart, afterwards editor of the *Quarterly* and son-in-law and biographer of Scott. Neither of them was at any time in the strict sense editor, and the final decision always rested with the publisher himself; but at one time he, Wilson, and Lockhart held, as it might be said, the editorship in commission, and until Blackwood's death and his own failure of health and spirits Wilson continued to hold something like this position after Lockhart had gone to London. Wilson, the elder of

the two by nearly ten years, was born at Paisley in 1785 and educated at Glasgow and Oxford. He had inherited wealth, and for some time lived on his means at Elleray on Windermere. But the loss of great part of his fortune made him betake himself to Edinburgh, where his mother was living, and though he made no mark at the Bar, he found his vocation almost at once on *Blackwood*, and before long was elected to the Chair above mentioned. For fully twenty years he was the soul of the magazine under the name of "Christopher North," and actually wrote a large part of it in one form or another. In later years he took less share, but he held his Chair till 1852, and lived till 1854.

Before "Maga," as *Blackwood's Magazine* called itself by a punning abbreviation, came into existence, Wilson had made some distinction for himself as a poet, or at least a verse-writer, in his two volumes, *The Isle of Palms* (1812) and *The City of the Plague* (1816). The chief interest of these is, however, that they show the rapidity with which the example of the really great poets of the Romantic revival was caught up and followed. He also wrote stories, *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*, *The Trials of Margaret Lindsay*, etc., which are of very little merit, and are chiefly remarkable as showing the excessive sentimentality which supplied the reaction to Wilson's boisterous spirits. Had his work been confined to these things it would now be wholly forgotten. But in magazine-writing itself he found or made the style which was his own—a style of fluent, full-voiced, indeed, as has been said, rather boisterous, descant upon things in general—sport, literature, scenery, politics, gastronomy, art. These descants sometimes took the shape of dialogue in the famous *Noctes Ambrosianae*—a set of symposia the origination of which is variously attributed to Wilson himself, Lockhart, and Maginn (*vide infra*), but which fell more and more under the sole management of Wilson—sometimes into monologues or ordinary reviews, many of which were collected later as *The Recreations of Christopher North*. A large number of these last are literary in subject, but Wilson also contributed much literary criticism of a less mercurial kind in the four volumes of his *Essays, Critical and Imaginative*, especially in the fourth.

Wilson had great powers, and his writings contain many admirable things. In particular, he was one of the main pioneers in the new adventure of ornate prose which, as on other occasions, succeeded the poetical outburst of the earlier years of the century; and some of his efforts in this kind are not easily to be surpassed. He was also one of the first to record, in less formal language than Gilpin and his followers in the Picturesque, the effects of scenery, and quite the first to give literary form to field sports, while his talent for

weaving miscellanea of all kinds into dialogue owed little to any model, and displayed resource and dexterity not falling far short of genius. But these merits were accompanied, nay, inextricably blended with, and also to no small extent marred by, great faults, of which the violence, both personal and political, common to the time was almost the least. The most important of these was, in the first place, an almost incredible and quite unparalleled infirmity of taste, which allowed him to slip into the trivial, the tedious, the idly extravagant, and now and then the simply disgusting. Even at his best he seldom knows that last secret, the secret where to stop, and his prolixity and inequality together make even "beauties" from him hard to select. Another and still worse fault was more moral than literary, though strictly on the literary side of morals—an inexplicable tendency to make always rude and sometimes venomous attacks, under cover of anonymity, on persons who not merely deserved literary consideration, but were in some cases his private friends and even benefactors.

Lockhart.

John Gibson Lockhart was also deeply tinged with the aggressive, and sometimes scurrilous, personality of the time, but his taste was seldom to seek, and he has no proven crimes of literary *lèse-majesté* or personal ingratitude to atone for. He was born at Cambusnethan in July 1794, was educated at Glasgow and Oxford, took a very good degree, travelled in Germany, and returning to Edinburgh, practised at the bar. He began his connection with letters by translating Schlegel's *Lectures on History*, joined heart and soul in the early sports and wars of *Blackwood* (which on more than one occasion nearly ended in bloodshed, and once did so, though he was not personally engaged), and in 1819 published, with some collaboration from Wilson, the amusing Smollett-like book on Edinburgh and its society called *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*.[1] He married Sophia Scott in 1820, and for some years lived, when not in Edinburgh, at Chiefswood, on the Abbotsford property, writing his four novels and his charming *Spanish Ballads*, with much miscellaneous work for *Blackwood*. At the end of 1825 he was appointed to the editorship of the *Quarterly*, and, moving to London, wrote a great deal for the *Review* and a little for *Fraser*, began his famous *Life of Scott* in 1837, was made Auditor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1843, and died in 1854, his health broken, partly by work, partly also by family troubles, for his wife and both his sons died before him.

No one would deny that Lockhart's most certain and enduring title to literary remembrance lies in his *Life of Scott*, a book which

[1] The title was a play on that of Scott's account of his journey to the Continent after Waterloo, *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk*.

indeed has an almost unmatched subject, and enjoys the half illegitimate advantage of a great amount of matter from that subject's own hand. But unfortunate experience shows us how insufficient even such advantages are to make a good book; and this is confessedly one of the best books in the world. For Lockhart has not only written it admirably; he has not only exhibited, in his admissions and exclusions, that good feeling which was, as a rule, denied him by his enemies; but he has also exhibited taste, judgment, sense of proportion, in a matter where the exercise of such sense is most difficult, to an extent hardly paralleled in any other biography.[1] He is by no means a born novelist, though there are good, and almost great, things in his novels; and, though he had an exquisite touch both of humour and pathos in verse, he hardly pretended to be a poet. By far the greatest expense of his literary power was upon criticism and miscellaneous essay-and-article-writing, of the kind generally classed as journalism. No collection of these writings of his has ever been made; and he was universally believed in his lifetime—nor has he been quite cleared of the charge since—to have strained the privileges of an anonymous critic to, and sometimes beyond, their limit. It is certain, however, that even in those writings of his which his admirers most wish that he had not written, or hope that he did not write, an intellectual power and a faculty of sarcastic attack only surpassed by Swift appear. In less disputable matter Lockhart was always a competent, though sometimes a severe and rather prejudiced, critic. He accepted the earlier Romantic movement, but could never quite reconcile himself to its most luxuriant exuberance in Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson, while his taste in prose also set distinctly against the floridity reintroduced in different ways by De Quincey, Wilson, and Landor.

The other main early contributors to *Blackwood* were lesser men. William Maginn (1793-1842), an Irishman of extraordinary versatility, much wit, and some scholarship, but tinged with too many of the weaknesses and vices of Bohemianism, had much to do with *Maga*, and more later with *Fraser's Magazine*, to which latter he bore much the same relation as Wilson did to *Blackwood* itself. Maginn, who served as a model for Thackeray's Captain Shandon, undoubtedly possessed powers which, if concentrated and chastened, would have enabled him to produce work of very high quality, and as it is, some of his stories and verses (*A Story without a Tail*, *Bob Burke's Duel*, *The Pewter Quart*, *Maxims of Morgan O'Doherty*, etc.) come little short of genius. He gathered round him in *Fraser* a set of contributors

[1] Lockhart exhibited the same qualities, on a smaller but not less difficult scale, in a long article, published later as a small book, on Theodore Hook, after the death of that ingenious Bohemian.

almost more brilliant than those of *Blackwood* or of the *London* itself, ranging from Coleridge to Thackeray, and including Carlyle.

James Hogg was also one of Maginn's men, but was of much more importance as supplying the figure of "the Shepherd" in the *Notes*, a personage with most of Hogg's faults, but with much more than his merits.[1]

The *London* set, rather absurdly described by their Edinburgh rivals as "Cockney," were almost entirely independent, though De Quincey formed a kind of link between the two periodicals. The first editor of the *London*, John Scott, has only made a mark by his lamentable death, an imbroglio between himself and Lockhart ending in an actual duel between Scott and Lockhart's friend Christie, in which the former, by the mismanagement or bloodthirstiness of his second, fell. But the *London* had Thomas Hood for its sub-editor at one time, it actually introduced Lamb and De Quincey to essay-writing, and it served for years as the chief organ, though Leigh Hunt had his own, of the writers—sometimes, but not by any means always, anti-Tory in politics, and almost always Romantic in literature—who had their headquarters in London itself. Others of these, besides Hunt, made their chief appearances elsewhere, but they may be most satisfactorily treated here and together. The *London*.

Charles Lamb, who is perhaps more nearly unique than any other English writer outside the great poets, was a Londoner born, bred, and, by predilection as well as fate, resident. His birthday was 18th February 1775, his father was a lawyer's clerk, he was sent to Christ's Hospital, where he first fell into the society of Coleridge, and he was early provided for by a clerkship in the East India House. But his circumstances were most unfavourably affected by hereditary madness, which indeed never in his own case (except for a very short time) went beyond eccentricity, but which afflicted his beloved elder sister Mary so sorely that she murdered her mother in one fit of insanity, and was subject to others, with increasing frequency as she grew older, for the rest of her life. Lamb devoted himself (there was another brother more prosperous, but more selfish) entirely to her, and never married. It would appear that, even independently of the influence of Coleridge (which, however, like all that wonderful person's associates, he felt deeply), he had been attracted to the study of the Elizabethan, and in an even greater degree to that of the Jacobean and Caroline, writers. He wrote some early poems of little merit; essayed an Lamb.

[1] The story of *Blackwood* and its contributors, long partially and incorrectly known, has now been fully told in Mrs. Oliphant's and Mrs. Porter's *House of Blackwood* (3 vols. Edinburgh, 1897-98).

Elizabethan tragedy, *John Woodvil*, which has more ; composed, with his sister, some *Tales from Shakespeare*, followed up in the same kind afterwards by the *Adventures of Ulysses*, which are admirable in a most dangerous kind ; and executed, with very brief critical notes which are jewels, two volumes of selections from the Elizabethan drama displaying wonderful sympathy and insight.

It is, however, improbable that he would have been much more than a curiosity of literature—one of those not so very rare figures who make us say, "What a pity this man never found his way!"—or that at best his real worth would have been known only from his letters, which are numerous and charming, if the establishment of the *London Magazine*, followed as it was by his retirement from his clerkship on a pension, had not elicited from him the famous *Essays of Elia*. It is impossible to describe these ; in point of subject they are literally *de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*, the quaint fancy of the writer evolving, as he handles each of his more tangible matters of thought, fancies that never were anywhere, that never were to be anywhere, but in his own writings. Nor is his style more capable of exact definition. That a certain amount of his material is derived from actual loans supplied by the quainter writers of the mid seventeenth century, especially Burton, Fuller, and Browne, is perfectly true, as also that the essayist's debt to these for manner and method is even greater than his borrowings of actual matter or word. But a great deal remains which is simply Lamb himself and nobody else. Not only is he thus unique among English writers, but he is equally unique among the smaller and specially national body of English humorists. Nobody has ever succeeded in imitating him, even in his most obvious quaintnesses, while the blending of these quaintnesses with a pathos which is never mere sentiment is a secret not merely undiscovered yet by imitators, but escaping even any complete analysis—a Proteus never to be bound by the most enduring Ulysses, but fortunately amiable enough to bestow his wisdom and his graces without any such process.

Leigh Hunt.

Henry James Leigh Hunt, who was born in 1784, and like Lamb was a Blue-coat boy, had the same introduction to official life (in his case in the War Office), but gave it up under the double seductions of laziness and literature. He had a brother who was a better man of business than himself, and the two set up a newspaper—the *Examiner*—which took strong Liberal and Opposition views. Hunt himself was imprisoned—a mere restriction of movement—for a libel on the Prince Regent in 1812. He survived this for nearly fifty years (he died in 1859), during which his abode was, except for one visit to Italy, wholly London and its neighbourhood, and his occupation unceasing literary labour.

Neither in verse, in which he wrote a good deal (*vide infra*), nor in prose, in which he wrote much more, was Leigh Hunt exactly supreme. Want of time (for he always wrote for bread) prevented him as it was; while want of taste would probably have prevented him in any case. But he was of the great miscellanists of English literature—a critic who, as far as the merely appreciative part of his business is concerned, has had few superiors; and a writer of the purely general essay, the "article," which was more and more hitting popular taste, and which has never lost it since, after a fashion which owed little to any forerunners, and has taught much to scores, almost to hundreds, of followers. Hunt tried longer work in novel and otherwise, but was quite unfit for it: he was a journalist and essayist born. But he inclined towards the older rather than the younger types of these in being prone to write wholly or mainly by himself. He was the sole or the principal contributor to the *Reflector* (1810), the *Indicator* (1819-21), the *Companion* (1828), the *New Tatler* (1830-32), and the *London Journal* (1834-35). His work in these and other things was at different times rearranged and diversified with fresh matter or presented for the first time in different forms—*Men, Women, and Books*, *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla*, *Wit and Humour*, *Imagination and Fancy*, etc. He wrote a pleasing *Autobiography*, and an admirable book on London, *The Town*. But always, and first of all, he is a miscellanist and a writer of essays.

Lamb was an exquisite, and Leigh Hunt a very agreeable, critic, the former in regard to a limited and rather haphazard group of personal predilections of his own, the latter in a sphere very creditably wide, though determined rather by instinct than by reason. The third great member of the "Cockney" school, though even his criticism was too much vitiated by extra-literary prejudice, was far greater as a critic than either—was indeed one of the very greatest critics who have ever lived. He was also—unlike his companions—a critic, or at least an essayist, merely, though he wrote a philosophical book of no great merit at the beginning of his career, and a historical one of less at the end of it. William Hazlitt, who was of Irish extraction, was born at Maidstone in 1778. He was rather early thrown into contact with Coleridge, bestowed when young much attention on art, but finally settled down to literary work in London, afterwards at Winterslow on Salisbury Plain, where his first wife had some property, and then in 1812 in London again. Nor did he move his headquarters till his death in 1830. He seems to have enjoyed his life, but it was not what would generally be called a fortunate one. Both his marriages were unlucky, the first ending in a regular divorce, the second in his wife's leaving him after a short time. His temper, even by personal and political

Hazlitt.

friends, was found to be almost intolerable; and though he only shared with some very amiable persons the abuse of violent partisans on the side opposed to Liberalism, he provoked, rivalled, and more than requited their acrimony, indulging in the most ferocious abuse not merely of personal literary foes, but of men like Scott and Wellington, who were entirely out of his sphere, and had certainly never provoked him in any way.

This waspishness (to use an unfair word, for the wasp never stings unless meddled with) invalidates a small part even of his criticism, as, for instance, in reference not merely to Burke and other Conservative writers, not merely to contemporaries of Liberal principles, like Shelley, who were gentlemen, and therefore obnoxious to his democratic envy, but to inoffensive antiquities like the monarchical poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He was also rather insufficiently equipped with knowledge of other languages and literatures. But, despite these drawbacks, his collected critical lectures and essays on English literature, as well as a good many independent essays, contain perhaps the very finest work of their kind—free from the tentative and experimental character of Dryden, from the limits and blinkers of the eighteenth century, from the scrappiness and vagueness of Coleridge, from the crotchet of Lamb, from the lack of intellectual quality in Hunt, and from the sometimes arbitrary eclecticism of Mr. Matthew Arnold.

Besides this great accomplishment, Hazlitt was a very good critic of art, though in a less technical kind than that which has since become fashionable, and such a master of the miscellaneous essay that his faculty for this has by some been put even above his purely critical power. In his own time Hazlitt, though disliked and abused, was a writer of weight; in the generation succeeding his death he was, save by a few of the best judges, such as Thackeray, rather undervalued and neglected; and it is only of late years that he has been restored, and perhaps even yet not fully restored, to his proper place.

Thomas De Quincey, the one link of great importance between the hostile camps, was born in the suburbs of Manchester in the year 1785. His father died when he was quite young, but left considerable property, his share of which De Quincey afterwards got rid of in ways not discreditable so much as eccentric —by exercises of literary generosity (he gave Coleridge a large sum), by the most reckless anticipations, by neglecting to adopt any profession, and by such merely wilful oddities as disqualifying himself for the valuable Hulme Exhibition from Manchester Grammar School to Brasenose College by running away from the former place of learning, and then going to Oxford after all at his own expense.

De Quincey.

The college he chose was Worcester, where he resided for a long time, but where he took no degree. He settled after some years in the Lakes, married, and lived quietly for twenty years, after which he moved to Edinburgh, living there or at Lasswade till 1859, when he died, the last of his generation except Landor. The singular adventures of his errant youth, and the results of his habit of opium-eating, have been told by himself in various forms and places, specially in his *Autobiography* and in the earlier and more famous *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, which first appeared in the *London Magazine* during the course of the year 1821. He had published nothing of any importance before, though he had been a very deep and wide student, and had helped Wordsworth to prepare his "Note on the Convention of Cintra" for press.

Having thus made discovery of his ability for literary composition, and being, moreover, urged by the insufficiency of his income, De Quincey, for nearly the last forty years of his life, devoted himself to writing with an untiring energy, the due rewards of which were to a great extent lost to him by his incurably unpractical ways in almost all respects. But towards the end of his life he made a very large collection of reprinted articles, which (further enlarged since his death) is perhaps the most important in bulk and the most varied in subject of any collection of *Miscellanea* in English. De Quincey's merits, indeed, were so numerous and so great that only the presence, side by side with them, of very serious defects of a peculiarly annoying character has kept him out of one of the very highest positions in literature—to which position, indeed, he has been actually admitted by some. He had a singular combination of exact scholarship with wide desultory reading; an entirely original faculty of narrative; a rare gift for exposition, either in summary of fact or concentration of argument; an intensely individual, though fitful, humour; and a hardly matched—a certainly unsurpassed—command of gorgeous rhetorical style. Of this last, indeed, he was very well aware, and was misled by it into the critical error of regarding all plain prose style as inferior, instead of, as it really is, in perfection the equal of the most ornate.

On the other hand, De Quincey was liable to accesses of tedious digression and "rigmarole," which make it sometimes impossible to read him through; his purely critical faculty was singularly untrustworthy, and almost as likely to lead him wrong as to lead him right; his humour, when it ceased to be grim or dreamy, had a distressing habit of falling into clumsy jocularity and horseplay. Although, therefore, his works, voluminous as they are, have been very widely read, there have always been dissidents in the appreciation of them, and this dissidence has rather gained strength recently.

It is not, however, of much importance; for though sound criticism will never fail to take note of his weaknesses, such things as the *Confessions* and their appendices (especially the splendid "Ladies of Sorrow"), the *Autobiography*, and the essays on *The English Mail Coach*, *Murder as one of the Fine Arts*, *Joan of Arc*, *The Spanish Nun*, *The Cæsars*, and a good many others, are quite sure of their place. De Quincey's historical position, however, depends less upon details than upon the fact that he was one of the very first to attempt, and one of the most successful in achieving, one of the great turns in the long race of English prose style—the nineteenth-century reaction from plain to ornate prose-writing. And it is significant and interesting that, as was also the case with another reformer, Landor, he found his easiest and most successful exercising ground in dreams. For a hundred and fifty years the effort of prose, even in the mouths and pens of men like Gibbon and Johnson, had been to be first of all practical—its aim was now to be first of all imaginative. No doubt part of the attempt was due to the Wordsworthian heresy, which De Quincey strongly shared, of the non-necessity of metre in poetry; but this did not matter. The reformers may sometimes have intended to write prose-poetry, which is a bastard and tainted in blood; but they really produced a true new cross in imaginative prose.

Landor himself, technically no essayist, but, like some writers of the seventeenth century, illustrating the essay-*nisus* in a slightly altered form, belongs to this chapter not merely on that ground. For with Wilson and De Quincey he is the earliest, and in some ways he is almost by himself the greatest, of the reformers, or, as some would say, revolutionisers, of prose style. His prose work was not early, and it took a form not very convenient, but maintained with characteristic obstinacy by the artist—that of *Imaginary Conversations*, reaching in their total a very great bulk. The first collection of these appeared in 1831, when their author was fifty-six, and this was succeeded by others, sometimes under the general title, sometimes specialised as *Examination of Shakespeare* (1836), *Pericles and Aspasia*, *The Pentameron*. The formal and the material value of these things are very far apart, and they cannot be praised without qualification even in respect of form. For such conversations a dramatic command of character would seem to be necessary, and Landor had none; humour likewise—and Landor's humour was "a terrible *minus* quantity"; detachment—and Landor was a bundle of prejudices, at times furiously voiceful and never quite silent. But his astonishing gift of style and, despite his crotchets and his too frequent silliness, his attachment to the great standard models of conduct in action and proportion in expression, convey to them an extraordinary charm.

Landor's prose.

Standing as he does at the turning of the way in prose, and indeed in literature generally, he manages to combine classical grace, dignity, adjustment, and even not infrequently measure, with Romantic colour, suggestion, variety, to an extent wonderful and sometimes consummate. He never quite succeeds in being easy, and he never has the very least imaginative wizardry. He is stilted beside Addison, prosaic beside Browne; but as much of either as would mix is in him, and the blend is not a little delightful.

William Cobbett, older than most of these men, and a strong contrast, in his bringing-up and circumstance, to their mostly academic education and their usual position in society, gives a yet more special contrast with Landor in his style, the perfection of the vernacular made literary—the last great representative of the line of Latimer and Bunyan. Cobbett was born in 1762, and died a member of the Reformed Parliament in 1835. He was the son of a farmer-labourer, served for some time in the army, where he became sergeant, but resided in America for the later years of the eighteenth century, beginning his newspaper experiences there with *Peter Porcupine's Journal*, and writing fully up to his title. Soon after his return to England in 1800, appeared his *Weekly Register*, in which, under difficulties (including one imprisonment and another exile to the United States), as well as in a crowd of books little and big, he continued, for the rest of his life, to vent political ideas, sometimes generous, often mischievous, nearly always unpractical, in admirable English. Besides direct politics, grammar, Church history, the currency, potatoes (their badness), maize (its goodness), and a thousand other things, occupied Cobbett's pen; while his *Rural Rides* give some of the most vivid, if not the most ornate, description in the language. Cobbett.

The great names of Macaulay and Carlyle, hardly junior to most here, will be treated under another head, though both were essayists, and perhaps essayists first of all. Those of some others (of whom Hartley Coleridge (1796-1849), son of the poet, inheritor of his weaknesses, but not so very far removed from his ability both as poet and as critic, is the most important) belong to a fuller story than this.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAST GEORGIAN PROSE

Southey's prose — Historical writing: Mitford, Roscoe, and others — Hallam — Milman — Arnold, Grote, and Thirlwall — Mackintosh and Bentham — Macaulay.

It has seemed desirable to separate from the essayists, though in some cases they were the same persons, those prose-writers, who in the older forms of elaborate composition — history, philosophical and scientific discussion, theological writing, and so forth — composed books of substantive importance during the first thirty years or so of the century. The newer styles, ornate, abrupt, and what not, were slower in making irruption into these dignified regions; perhaps it may be said that a stouter resistance was opposed there by the publisher-guardians of the gates. *Sartor Resartus* could find no home except in a magazine, and was welcomed dubiously even there; the *Confessions of an Opium-Eater* would certainly have appeared at its author's own expense or not at all, had it been compelled to appear as a book first. If we take Macaulay as the last popular author of an older type in style, though he lived far into the Victorian era, Carlyle as the first of the new, though he was born before Macaulay, and not much less than half a century before Queen Victoria came to the throne, we shall find the division useful as affecting this Book and the next. For Carlyle first broke, as Macaulay, among men of commanding literary position, almost last sustained, the exclusive prestige of the older academic style in matter of book-writing.

Many of the essayists and journalists mentioned in the last chapter, notably Lockhart, were themselves indisposed to the more anarchic fashions of style. But the greatest practitioner of a style, not indeed old-fashioned, but of the older fashion, was undoubtedly Southey. It has sometimes been supposed that those who make much of style imagine the existence of some single individual form of prose-writing, to be kept, like the standard weights and measures, in a literary Tower of London, and

Southey's prose.

not deviated from except under peril of the law. This, of course, would be an entire mistake. Almost every subject has a style of its own, and almost every writer has a style of his own ; though it is possible to range them all in the two great divisions of plain and ornate, and perhaps in some minor ones. But few will dispute that, if there could be such a form of style, if it were possible, by segregating individuality, to arrive at the general idea, then Southey has come as near as any Englishman to the ideal of prose writing on the less *flamboyant* side.

Not that his own writing is by any means monotonous, or even extremely uniform, in character. He had to play many parts with his pen—his *Histories of Brazil* (1810-19) and of *The Peninsular War* (1822-32), his historical biographies of Nelson (1813—his masterpiece), Cowper, Wesley (1820), and others, the vast mass of his articles and reviews, the enormous bulk of his private letters, of which the ten published volumes probably represent only the smaller part, the curious miscellany of *The Doctor*, and such different work as his *Book of the Church* (1824), his *Colloquies* (1829), his *Omniana*, his *Letters from Spain and Portugal*, with the later *Espriella* (1812), required, and duly received, different treatment. In the private letters and *The Doctor* (1834), a deliberate *fatrasie*, as the French called it in the sixteenth century, of reading, humour, and what not, he coins words liberally, and admits foreign languages with almost macaronic license. In his full-dress work he is almost Caesarian in his refusal of the unusual word, and his adherence to the best (not the most colourless and invertebrate) tradition of eighteenth-century style. But always he has the much talked of, the indefinable, but the at once perceptible, quality of "purity." He adjusts the scholarly and the vernacular, the businesslike and the ornamental, with an unerring calculation. He is, in short, the Addison, and far more than the Addison, of the early nineteenth century ; and it is a distinct misfortune that more of its writers have not given their days and nights to the reading of him.

Sir Humphry Davy in science, Dr. Chalmers in theology, and others in other branches, would claim notice in a larger space or in a more confined range than the present book allows ; but for our present purpose the important subject of history, which has been as much the prevailing subject of the nineteenth century, in prose on the great scale, as theology was of the seventeenth and philosophical speculation of certain kinds in the eighteenth, will probably suffice. It was not merely the example and the fame of Gibbon which tempted writers to this particular branch—the exciting and important events of the French Revolution invited treatment of contemporary themes, and the new-

Historical writing : Mitford, Roscoe, and others.

born passion for investigating the long-neglected archives of different nations necessitated the correction of the older current histories and facilitated the production of new. In the last half of the eighteenth century were born more distinguished historians than had been contributed by the whole course of English literary history. And there was a curious progression of excellence in the order of time. William Mitford (1744-1827) was a man of fortune and of rather unusual cultivation, who left the first really noteworthy book upon the theory of English metre.[1] His principal work was a *History of Greece*, written between 1784 and 1814, and very well written, though injured somewhat by a very strong political prejudice and by some mistakes of fact.

William Roscoe, who was born in 1753, and saw the reign of William IV., devoted himself to modern not to ancient history, and produced, in the *Life of Lorenzo de Medici* (1796) and *Leo X.* (1805), handbooks of the Italian Renaissance which have not yet grown obsolete. Sharon Turner (1768-1847), John Lingard (1772-1851), and Francis Cohen, who took the name of Palgrave (1788-1861), and was knighted, turned their attention, as it was high time some one should, to English history from a somewhat less superficial point of view than Hume's. Lingard produced a general history of England far in advance of anything yet written in point of scholarly accuracy. Turner and Palgrave attacked the origins, which had hardly received any new light since the investigations of Elizabethan and seventeenth-century authorities, Turner taking chiefly Anglo-Saxon, Palgrave chiefly Anglo-Norman times as his province. Sir James Mackintosh (1765-1832) bestowed a good deal of his somewhat inadequately represented ability and learning upon history; and Sir William Napier (1785-1860), with some passion and prejudice, but with the most intimate knowledge of his subject, and showing a command of vivid literary representation excessively rare, if not almost unknown, in a professional historian, gave, in 1828-40, his famous *History of the Peninsular War*.

All these men produced historical work which deserves esteem, some of them work deserving of something much beyond it; and the general appetite for history in readers, and readiness to gratify that appetite in writers, may be judged from the fact that the poets Scott, Moore, and Campbell, the critic Hazlitt, and other men whose vocation did not directly place them under the invocation of Clio, composed extensive books of the kind. But the art and science of the historian had not been so well represented in any man since Gibbon as they were represented in Henry Hallam (1777 or 1778-1859). He was

[1] *An Enquiry into the Principles of the Harmony of Language*, 2nd ed. 1804. The first, in cruder form, had been published some thirty years before.

a son of the Dean of Bristol, passed through Eton, Christ Church, and the Middle Temple, and became a bencher of his Inn; but he made no figure in practice, having private means, and becoming a Government servant pretty early. He had written for the *Edinburgh Review*, being a decided, though not violent, Whig, for many years before he made his appearance as a historian with his *View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages* (1818). In 1827 he published his principal work, *The Constitutional History of England from the Accession of Henry VII. to the Death of George II.*, and in 1839 his *Introduction to the Literature of Europe during the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries*. Besides his own work, and his wide literary friendships, Hallam had an additional and strong, though indirect, connection with literature through the fact that his son, Arthur Henry Hallam, who died in 1833, was the intimate friend of Tennyson, and by his death gave birth to *In Memoriam*.

Hallam.

Hallam was a good deal overpraised during his life as a critic, for he was the oracle of one triumphant and self-satisfied party, and was less than usually obnoxious to the other. The strange slowness, moreover, with which English criticism mastered the comparative method, obtained for his literary judgments, both in his own and other literatures, not merely during his life but for many years after his death, an authority considerably greater than that which really belonged to them. For Hallam came a little too early to avail himself of that rediscovery of its earlier treasures which every nation in Europe made as a consequence of the Romantic movement; he was very partially in sympathy with that movement; and though he could understand he could not love—a nearly fatal disqualification for a literary critic or even a literary historian. But this disqualification does not attach to the historian proper, whatever it may do to the historical biographer; and in his history proper Hallam's work was of extreme value. Even his Whig prepossessions did not interfere with this: because he was never unfair, and his prejudice merely gave him a solid and honestly confessed basis on which to take his stand, and from which to take his view. He never, like his great pupil Macaulay, succumbed to suppression or suggestion, and a simple allowance for the *idola* of the Whig tradition will almost always extract from his work a trustworthy and reasonable statement of historic fact. He occupies among English historians a station much higher than that of Guizot, and not much below that of Ranke, among foreign, and his capacity for mere writing, though it did not give him brilliancy or charm, permitted him always a scholarly adequacy and competence.

Very like Hallam, but something of a poet, and as a poet

possessing the touch of passion which Hallam rather fatally lacked, was Henry Hart Milman (1791-1868). Like Hallam he was an Eton and Oxford man, his college being Brasenose, and in his University he became not merely Bampton Lecturer but Professor of Poetry. Not much general memory of his poems survives, but his tragedy of *Fazio* was perhaps the very best of the somewhat artificial school succeeding the alternate rant and drivel of the eighteenth century, and some of his hymns are among the best in English. His literary exercises included contributions to the *Quarterly Review;* but it was not till he was nearly forty (for he had had parochial work in addition to his other occupations) that, in 1829, he published his first historical book, *The History of the Jews.* He improved upon this in *The History of Christianity to the Abolition of Paganism* (1840); but both books were quite put in the shade by his *History of Latin Christianity*, which appeared in 1856, the year of his grand climacteric. In his earlier work he had relied too much on that uncritical adoption of German criticism which has been the origin, and the destruction, of the reputation of so many Englishmen. In the *History of Latin Christianity* he relied on solid reading, not of commentaries but of text, on the inherent powers of a great subject, and on a style which, though it has no very salient mannerism, combines ease with dignity, and neither wearies nor irritates the reader.

Milman.

During the same decade were born three historians who busied themselves with classical history—Dr. Arnold (1795-1842), who devoted himself to the Roman annals; Mr. Grote (1794-1871) and Bishop Thirlwall (1797-1875), who busied themselves with Greek. The first was born in the Isle of Wight, and went to Winchester and to Corpus, Oxford. He became Fellow of Oriel at a very early age, took private pupils for some years, and was then made headmaster of Rugby, and later Professor of Modern History at Oxford. The last appointment was made too late for him to do much in it; the earlier entirely revolutionised Rugby itself, and had a great indirect effect on all English schools. Historically he fell into the same pitfall which had ensnared Milman (while he did not, like Milman, live to get out of it) by paying too much attention to Niebuhr. He was, however, a man of vigorous though prejudiced intellect, with a cramping theory that "everything was an open question"; and in style he was not unworthy to be the father of the author of *Essays in Criticism.* Indeed, as far as style went, he stood ahead of both the Hellenists, and very far ahead of Grote. This latter, a London banker, a member of Parliament, and an extreme though rather theoretical Radical, was in the latter capacity chagrined by Mitford's unfavour-

Arnold, Grote, and Thirlwall.

able sketch of Greek democracy, and set himself to draw a counter picture. He had good knowledge, and was one of the earliest historians to "realise" events in the modern manner, treating, for instance, the case of Cleon very much as if he had been backing that worthy for a seat in an English constituency. But the form of his work is extremely defective, its scale is enormous and tiresome, and its perpetual advocacy makes the reader long for the time when the "hoarse Bar" will be silent and the Bench will speak.

With a little more good luck the desideratum might have been supplied by Connop Thirlwall, whose *History* appeared before Grote's, and was in the popular estimate superseded by it, but who has all the qualities of the historian (except that of vivid realisation) in a far superior degree. Thirlwall, an extraordinarily clever child, a ripe scholar later, and to the end of his life a man of the first intellectual and moral excellence, was born in Stepney, was educated at Charterhouse and Trinity College, Cambridge, passed from the law to the Church, held a country living for some years, and in 1840 was promoted to the see of St. David's, which he held for half a lifetime. That Thirlwall was not much less strong a Liberal than Grote, and, that like Grote, he imported some purpose, though less, into his history, did not do much harm, for his mind was almost as little partisan as Hallam's, and the same moderate correction for the longitude will set it right. But though his style is infinitely more correct than Grote's, and possesses dignity and even some grace, it is not in any sense inspiring, and no history that is to be more than document can afford to dispense with charm or vigour of style And partly through this want, partly owing to the character of its writer the book is far too destitute of the picturesqueness which, easily as it may be overdone, is a *sine qua non* of a great history.

Three somewhat older men may be mentioned before we come to the final name of the chapter—Mackintosh, Bentham, and James Mill. Mill (1773-1836), the chief propagator of Bentham's philosophy, the historian (with great and, perhaps, deliberate inaccuracy) of British India, and the possessor of a style as crabbed as his master's and as unamiable as his own character, deserves slight mention. Sir James Mackintosh was born in Inverness-shire in 1765, and was educated at the Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh. He took his degree in medicine, but went to the London bar, and wrote politics for some time before his *Vindiciae Gallicae*—a Jacobin apology in his twenty-sixth year produced as an answer to Burke—attracted the attention of the extremer Whigs. He lectured at Lincoln's Inn in 1799, defended Peltier, Bonaparte's enemy, in 1803, became Recorder of Bombay in 1804, returned, after spending eight years in India, to sit in Parliament

Mackintosh and Bentham.

and profess Law and History at Haileybury, and died in 1832, just too early to reap the fruits of the Liberal triumph. He wrote on philosophy, on politics, on law, on history; and the worst things to be said about him are that he wrote on each too much like a professor of one or more of the others, and that his style, though with considerable mannered grace of its own, is too florid, and smacks too much of eighteenth-century thinness draped with Johnsonian phrase. He never concentrated himself either in subject or form, and has left nothing that does his reputation thorough justice. Yet the defence of Peltier is one of the very best and most literary of forensic pleadings in English, and the *Dissertation on Ethics* is a masterpiece of exoteric philosophical exposition.

Jeremy Bentham, who died in the same year with Mackintosh, but was born much earlier, in 1748, was a Londoner, was educated at Westminster and Queen's College, Oxford, and entered an Inn of Court. His instincts and interests were indeed almost wholly legal, but he was dispensed by private means from the necessity of practising, and, unlike most lawyers, perhaps because he did not practise, he advocated legal and other reforms of a mostly destructive character. Opinion, very unfavourable to him at first, came round to a large extent, though the wheel is now turning again, and even his demonstration against the Usury Laws, long pronounced unanswerable, is doubted now. But literature looks to the way in which he enforced his views, not to their nature or purport, their triumph or decay. Here he may be credited with vigour and clearness of thought, which very seldom finds a corresponding vigour or clearness of expression. Even in his most purely critical work, as where he deals with popular fallacies, the form is always below the occasion, and where he is expounding instead of pulling to pieces, the want of clearness and of style is still more painfully apparent.

The last author of first-rate importance in the older prose, though he gave it a colour and form which made him more popular than any innovator, was Thomas Babington Macaulay, who played more than one part both in life and in literature, but was, on the whole and in his heart, more of a historian than of anything else. He was born at Rothley Temple, in Leicestershire, on 25th October 1800; his father, Zachary, was a very strong partisan of negro emancipation. Macaulay went to no public school, but was sent to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he made many friends, took the Chancellor's Prize for English verse twice, and (though not without some obstacle, from his dislike to mathematics) a high degree and a Fellowship. He had been born to affluence, but his father was unlucky, and Macaulay had at first to look mainly to his Fellowship for actual, and to the Bar for future, support. He had,

Macaulay.

however, begun literature early, contributing, with Praed and others, to Knight's *Quarterly Magazine*. At about the age of five-and-twenty he caught the attention of Jeffrey by his famous "Milton" Essay, and according to the tradition then still prevailing, was eagerly welcomed by the Whigs, not merely as a useful literary hand, but as a political candidate of promise. He was put into the pocket borough of Calne, championed the Reform Bill, and might probably have had office at home; but being both poor and prudent, he preferred to lay a more solid foundation for his career by accepting the post of legal member of the Indian Council, which gave him a chance of large savings. He remained abroad about five years, and during that time made himself independent. On his return he became member for Edinburgh, and shortly after Secretary for War, while later he was Paymaster-General. He lost his seat for a time, but recovered it in 1852, became Lord Macaulay of Rothwell in 1857, and died of heart disease at the end of 1859, on 28th December.

His verse, which is very noteworthy, if not absolutely of the first class, will be noticed in the next chapter; his essays, speeches, and *History of England* concern us here. All this prose work is permeated by a not very complex, but extremely interesting, important, and distinct idiosyncrasy of character in spirit and in form. Macaulay's thought and his style were even more intimately connected than is usual. The former only concerns us indirectly, and in so far as it helps to explain the latter. Macaulay was the very incarnation of the prevailing character of Englishmen between Waterloo and the Indian Mutiny—a hater of abstract principles, transcendentalism, the vaguer forms of poetry, ceremonial and traditional religion; a Whig-Liberal, less on any coherent theory than from a belief that the Whig-Liberal predominance during the eighteenth century had made England great, and kept her at once from the excesses of absolutism and of republics; clear and trenchant but extremely narrow in thought; contemptuous of all things and periods, such as the Middle Ages and even the Renaissance, which he had not taken the trouble to understand; sure that all things worth understanding could be understood easily; incapable of admitting anything but downright estimates of character; an uncompromising partisan, and strongly tainted by that vice of the practical politician which makes him a little unscrupulous as to the means by which his party wins; not primarily interested in literature as literature, but cultivated enough to be enthusiastic about such things as appealed to him; compensating his liberalism in politics by a rather obstinate conservatism in style, and even to some extent in philosophy; a little exposed to the charge of shallowness, and sharply

limited in almost every direction ; healthy but imperfectly developed ; acute but incapable of comprehending the intangible.

In his essays, literary and political, and in the enormously proportioned history[1] which, intended to cover the period from the Exclusion Bill to a point not clearly signified, but apparently as late as the French Revolution, did not actually reach in its four large volumes the close of William's reign, this spirit finds its expression with a rare fidelity. He is not a consummate literary critic, for, though he liked almost all the best things from Shakespeare to Shelley, it was never for their actually literary characteristics that he liked them. But he has a wonderful power of representing historical events of the most complex kind ; and, subject to his own limitations, he can grasp and present a man nearly as well as a scene. No one before him had so well applied to history the combined forensic and debating gifts of putting a case intelligibly to the hearer in the way in which you wish him to decide it ; and it is fair to say that no one had given more untiring labour, or used his labour more felicitously, in mastering all details of place, time, and circumstance. And the mere style, learnt partly from Hazlitt, partly from Hallam, and with a little of Gibbon in it, in which Macaulay conveyed his meaning, was again absolutely faithful to his mode of thought. It was arranged with but few appliances except the consecrated antithetic balance, was "classical" in diction, and only ornamented as far as the vocabulary goes by a very liberal use of proper names, slightly fatiguing by its "snip-snap," as Brougham's sharp-sighted jealousy called it, but perfectly clear. On Coleridge's certainly inadequate principle that the whole virtue of style is to convey the author's meaning, no style can rank much higher. Suggestion it has none : it cannot, in the subtle way which the greater styles use, supply keys to unlock and power to set working, in the reader's mind, chambers of machinery supplemental to the author's own. But what Macaulay meant the reader understands at once and to the very full ; he feels with him or revolts against him with an instant response ; there is not a foot-pound of effort lost, not a stroke thrown away. And the general public, which was mainly in tune with him, answered by buying Macaulay as no historian had been bought before or has been bought since, and by making him, as essayist and historian together, the most popular and widely read prose author of England who has written other things than prose fiction.

[1] The *Essays*, all contributed to the *Edinburgh*, were collectively published in 1843 ; vols. i. and ii. of the *History* appeared in 1848, vols. iii. and iv. in 1855. Some speeches, biographies from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, etc., have to be added.

CHAPTER V

THE MINOR POETS OF 1800-1830

Rogers—Leigh Hunt and Hogg—A group of minors—Elliott, Mrs. Hemans, and "L. E. L."—Hood—Praed—Macaulay—Hawker and Barnes—Hartley Coleridge—Sir H. Taylor—Horne—Darley—Beddoes.

It has seemed worth while to deal separately with the minor poets of the Romantic movement, both in consequence of the great length of the first chapter of this Book, and because some of them at least form a well-separated group of transition between the great school of the first quarter of the century and the Victorians proper. Of these were a few who almost deserve to have been mentioned earlier, and at their head may perhaps be placed the long overrated name of Samuel Rogers (1765-1855). Had Rogers been a poor man of letters, his poetical claims would have received only the slightest attention. His first verse appeared in 1786, and showed absolutely nothing of the "false dawn" of that period; his *Pleasures of Memory*, still quite antique, in 1792; and he followed these up at long and easy intervals with others, the chief of which is *Italy* (1822). Rogers was a rich man, he was hospitably given, and a great "lioniser," and whether he was or was not as unamiable as he has been sometimes represented, he could and did use his tongue most formidably. In his later years, too, he became an interesting link, or rather bridge, covering one whole literary generation, and connecting its forerunner and follower. Moreover, he had just enough of romantic interest to vary and freshen his subjects. But there was none of the new music in him, little of the new pictorial power, and absolutely nothing of the new spirit.

Rogers.

Classification among minor poets would perhaps have been not much less disagreeable to the apparent nonchalance of Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) than to the uneasy vanity of James Hogg (1770-1835), and probably the admirers of both will resent it for them. Yet, on general and comparative grounds, it is inevitable, and there are even major poets than either

Leigh Hunt and Hogg.

in this very chapter. Both have been mentioned before, more particularly Hunt. His only poem of any size is the *Story of Rimini*, written during his prison sojourn in 1812 and published after his liberation in 1816. His pervading faults are obvious in it, and served as a main, if not an entire, justification for the violent attacks of the Tory critics on his taste and morals. But he had, from his study of seventeenth-century poets of the school that began with Browne and ended with Chamberlayne, revived *enjambement*, and with it a good deal of their florid ornament and narrative ease, so that he set on a promising path poets so much greater than himself as Keats and Shelley. And in some of his smaller pieces, scattered over different books and long ranges of time, he has enriched the anthologies with pleasant and occasionally excellent things in sonnet and snatch, in rondeau and romance. But though he is credited with some half-score volumes of verse, from the early (and worthless) *Juvenilia* to the *Stories in Verse* published in 1855, but four years before his death, the total does not make a large volume, and the really valuable things go in an extremely small one.

Hogg (whose *nom de guerre* of "the Ettrick Shepherd" was justified, for he was first a shepherd and then a sheep farmer during the whole of his life) was, in so far as his shorter life allowed, equally persistent and much more voluminous. Besides the extensive prose work already referred to, he published scattered verse early, *The Mountain Bard* in 1803, *The Forest Minstrel* in 1810, *The Queen's Wake* in 1813, and later *Mador of the Moor*, *The Pilgrims of the Sun*, *The Border Garland*, besides some of his best things foisted as Jacobite ballads, songs in *Blackwood*, etc. His very best pieces—"Kilmeny," "The Boy's Song," "Donald MacGillavry," and a few more—would, if they were preserved alone, almost justify his own idea of himself as "King of the Mountain and Fairy School of poetry," though not his other idea, that he was master of poetry on the great narrative scale. Take these comparatively few things out, and the large remainder of his work is often scarcely third-rate, and sometimes quite beneath criticism.

But we must become briefer. The Montgomeries, James (1771-1854) and Robert (1807-1855), belong to this group. James was the better poet; but it is questionable whether Macaulay's famous martyrdom of Robert will not give him the longer life as a name. Bernard Barton (1784-1849) was an amiable and fairly long-lived Quaker versifier, Henry Kirke White (1785-1806) an amiable and very short-lived Anglican poetaster. Tannahill (1774-1810), Cunningham (1785-1842), Motherwell (1797-1835), Tennant (1784-1848), Thom (1798-1848), D. M. Moir, the "Delta" of *Blackwood* (1788-1851), were Scotch poets of varying

A group of minors.

excellence; the songs of Cunningham and of Motherwell put them a good deal above the others, though "Delta" has fervent admirers both in prose and verse. Two farmer poets, Robert Bloomfield (1766-1823) and John Clare (1793-1864), rank as such in English literary history. Clare, like Christopher Smart, never acquired his full poetic power till madness seized him—as it had also seized Bloomfield, though with no such compensation. The *Farmer's Boy* of the latter is nothing but a not unpleasing versification of not uninteresting matter. Some pieces of Clare's (the best of which will be found in the second series of Mr. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*) are poems. Barry Cornwall (1790-1874), whose real name was Bryan Waller Procter, was the friend of many good men but not a very good poet; no better, perhaps, than the much-laughed-at Thomas Haynes Bayly (1797-1839). But the critical ability which can distinguish between "The sea, the sea" and "Oh no, we never mention her" is difficult to attain, and perhaps debilitating when acquired. Henry Cary (1772-1844), the translator of Dante; Reginald Heber (1783-1826), Bishop of Calcutta, and author of one of the very best of university prize poems, and more than one of the best modern hymns; Sir Aubrey de Vere (1788-1846), a poet and the father of poets—are names which must not even here be entirely passed over; but Ebenezer Elliott and Felicia Hemans must delay us a very little longer.

Elliott. Mrs. Hemans, and "L. E. L."

Elliott (1781-1849) was a Yorkshireman, and by no means an unprosperous one; but he early espoused the extreme views of social, economical, and political matters which infected the working classes between Waterloo and the middle of the century. As might be expected, he is not happy in the poems with a purpose, some of which gained him the name of the "Anti-Corn-Law Rhymer," though sometimes even here, especially in the "Battle Song," his native vigour gets the better of his acquired unreason. He began to write before the end of the eighteenth century, and lived to see the triumph of Free Trade. Elliott's real strength, except in a very few things like the piece just named, where his poetry succeeds in absorbing and transforming his crotchet, is as a poet of nature, in which character he has done some things not much less than excellent. Mrs. Hemans (1793-1835) was named, before her apparently unhappy married life, Felicia Dorothea Browne, and was a native of Liverpool. She was scarcely past forty when she died, and had then written a great quantity of fluent and not unmelodious verse of a strongly sentimental kind. It is fair to say that the latest in date is the best. She was a little outlived by her junior "L. E. L."—Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838), who to a pretty turn for verse added great personal charm and the

mystery of an unhappy end, for she died, poisoned by mistake or otherwise, at Cape Coast Castle, where the husband whom she had just married was Governor.

Thomas Hood was born in the heart of the City of London about 1798-99, the son of a bookseller. His schooling was irregular, and his early employments varied, owing to his father's ill success in business, while his health was very weak. The contemporary development of the press, however, was in time to provide him with his proper work, though not to give him the ample rewards for it which he would have received later. He became sub-editor of the *London Magazine*, and later edited others. But he was very unlucky in money matters, and the fault of others drove him to take refuge abroad, though he honourably met his creditors as soon and as fully as he could. Consumption carried him off in 1845, his ill-health and his ill-luck having been borne with an admirable gaiety which never degenerated into bravado. He was pensioned, but only just before his death.

Hood.

A good deal of Hood's work is mere hack labour—jokes pumped up for a livelihood—and of his longer attempts, though *Up the Rhine* is charming, *Tilney Hall* is not worth much. His fame rests upon about two volumesful of verse divided in a sharp, and to some it would seem disturbing, manner between the serious and the comical. From the very first the merit of the serious division has been recognised by the best judges, though ignored to too great an extent by the public; and it seems that the efforts of the former have at last some chance of success. Hood had real disadvantages of education, and still worse ones of circumstance; but to balance them, if not entirely to overcome them, he had two great gifts. One was that of genuine song-writing, whereby he produced too few but exquisite things, the poetry of the style in which Procter and Bayly were poetasters—"Fair Ines," "It was the time of Roses," "Farewell life, my senses swim," and others. The other was of a meditative and slightly "eerie" strain, best exemplified in *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* and *The Haunted House*, but manifested in many other pieces. This latter gift, if fed by scholarship and fostered by leisure, might have done great things; as it was it had hardly a chance. Nor ought it to be forgotten that Hood did do great things in a vein between pathos and humour, and that he succeeded in reaching popularity without forfeiting critical approval in the famous *Song of the Shirt* and *Bridge of Sighs*, both written so late in his career that he was evidently not in the least "written out."

Winthrop Mackworth Praed was a much more fortunate man than Hood, with gifts similar in many ways, perhaps a little thinner, but touched by fortune and art to even finer uses here and there. He

was born in 1802, the son of Serjeant Mackworth, who took the name of Praed, was sent to Eton and thence to Trinity College, Cambridge, entered Parliament rather early and continued in it for the best part of a decade, till his death in 1839. Praed. He had already his foot on the lower steps of office, and was thought likely, if not certain, to attain the higher had he lived. Praed's published work, like Hood's, contains a great deal of inferior matter, which he himself certainly would never have collected. The more valuable part consists of several verse-tales of an ironic-romantic character, very original and attractive, if not quite consummate; of one or two serious pieces, such as "Arminius" and "My Pretty Josephine," from which possibilities may be augured; of a splendid thing in the grim-grotesque style, "The Red Fisherman," better than any similar piece of Hood's; and above all, of a handful of examples of the kind called "verse of society," which are far the most charming of their kind in English, or rather are unique. These things, "The Season," "The Letter of Advice," "The Vicar," "A Letter from Teignmouth," and others, have an indescribable grace and charm.

The verse of Praed's college friend and rival Macaulay has been the occasion of curious dissent, not merely between critics and readers, but between one school of critics and another. It is not large in bulk, consisting of a few early pieces, and others written at different times, and of the well-known *Lays of Ancient Rome*, published in 1842. Macaulay. At first, and for years afterwards, these latter were favourably received both by critics and others. But it pleased Mr. Matthew Arnold, to whom Macaulay was the embodiment of his enemy the Philistine, and who did not like the ballad metre for ancient themes, to speak with the utmost contempt of them, and generation after generation of critics has echoed this contempt. Now, the poetry of Macaulay is not *great:* it is not the poetry of Tennyson or of Browning at its date; it has neither exquisiteness of artistic suggestion nor volume and range of poetical thought. But it is poetry—poetry for the million perhaps, except in a very few pieces, but not the less poetry; and those who do not recognise the poetic quality in it show that their poetical thermometer is deficient in delicacy and range.

Barnes and Hawker, two West-country clergymen, have had strong partisans, in each case not numerous, but respectable. The claims of Robert Stephen Hawker (1803-1875), a man of somewhat eccentric character, who retired early to the remote cure of Morwenstow, on the Devonshire border of Cornwall, held it for nearly half a century, and *in articulo mortis* was received into the Roman Church, are the safer of the two on Hawker and Barnes.

general literary grounds. His longest and most ambitious poem, *The Quest of the Sangreal*, perhaps just misses complete success, and is distinguished by that stately but somewhat lifeless character which is noticeable in more than one or two poets of this group. He is most widely known by an early and very clever *pastiche* in ballad, "The Song of the Western Men," which was taken even by good judges as an original. His best things, however, are short, and partly local, partly ecclesiastical in inspiration—"Queen Gwennyvar's Round," "The Bells of Bottreaux," "Morwenna Statio," and not a few others. Hawker had undoubtedly much and true poetry in him, but the hour had not come at his birth.

Of William Barnes (1800-1886) one must speak more diffidently, for on the one hand it is impossible to take poets on trust, and on the other unsafe to provoke his not very numerous but enthusiastic admirers. He wrote wholly in Dorset dialect, and chiefly on gentle, domestic, and pastoral themes, two features which attract many, revolt some, and perhaps count little one way or other with the critic. We must not rule a man out because he writes "smilen feäce" for "smiling face"; but in those who are jaded with "smiling face" there is perhaps a dangerous readiness to take "smilen feäce" as necessarily poetry.

Hartley Coleridge.

The foiled and marred genius of Hartley Coleridge (1796-1849) tried verse as well as prose, and has left its best memorials in the sonnet. Few better things have been written than the sonnet to Shakespeare, "The soul of man is larger than the sky" (which preceded, and perhaps inspired, the better known one of Matthew Arnold), and that on his own wasted life—"When I survey the course that I have run"—where the peculiar clangorous rise of strain (which is found in Shakespeare's own and the other best Elizabethan examples, and which seems to belong specially to the Shakespearian as opposed to the Petrarchian form) is very noticeable.

Sir H. Taylor.

Sir Henry Taylor was a very popular poet with thoughtful lovers of poetry in the second quarter of the century, and *Philip van Artevelde* (published in 1834) at least keeps a high place by virtue of traditional esteem, if not exactly of familiar acquaintance. Its author was born, like Macaulay, in 1800, but lived till 1888, being for the greater part of his life a Government servant. He began, with *Isaac Comnenus*, before Tennyson had published anything except *Poems by Two Brothers*, and continued with other things till the *St. Clement's Eve* of 1862; but by that time his fashion of poetry was *hesterna rosa*. Taylor's blank verse, besides serving frequently as the vehicle of an excellent seriousness, is dignified in itself and sufficiently varied for his purpose, but it was not very well

suited for any kind of poetry except the dramatic[1] and didactic. His lyric work, not abundant nor very varied, is good.

Taylor, though hardly a dramatist, was mainly a dramatic poet, and the dramatic bent is curiously illustrated in most of the poets of this transition, especially in Richard Hengist Horne, George Darley, and Thomas Lovell Beddoes. Horne, who was born three years later than Sir Henry Taylor, and died two years earlier, was a copious and miscellaneous writer, and his most famous and best thing, *Orion*, a poem of most stately versification, and very original in thought, but deficient in action, is an epic—a "farthing epic," for its eccentric author published it at that price—not a tragedy. But *Cosmo de Medici* and the *Death of Marlowe* take the dramatic form, though, like almost all the plays of this period, they are literature without acting qualities. Horne.

George Darley, born in the same year with Keats, was Irish, and of Dublin University, wrote on the *London*, and in later life was chiefly a critic. He was a good song-writer, in the same class with Hood, and his "I've been roaming" was once exceedingly popular; but his principal work is to be found in *Sylvia* (1827), and *Nepenthe* (1839). The former of these is a fairy play, unequal, full of superfluities and inequalities, and marred by awkwardly handled comic passages, but very charming in parts. It is spun of delightful lyrics, of octosyllabic couplets no less delightful, of other kinds of verse less uniformly charming, and of prose written too much in falsetto. It has, after many years, found a reprinter[2] and modern imitators, who, however, have not equalled Darley.

[1] The strange divorce between literature and drama which has marked the nineteenth century seems to make it useless to devote separate notice to this branch. The dramatic work of the greater men is best noticed with their poems. A characteristic example of the lesser is Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd (1795-1854, a judge, a friend of Lamb, and author of agreeable *Memorials* of him), whose half-famous *Ion* (1835) possesses a sort of icy beauty, or at least handsomeness. The chief dramatists of George IV.'s and William IV.'s reigns were James Sheridan Knowles (1784-1862) and the first Lord Lytton. Knowles had a good practical knowledge of the stage, and Bulwer was wise enough to accept advice from those who possessed it, so that in acting qualities the plays of both excel those of most English play-writers of any literary pretensions since Sheridan. But Knowles, whose best-remembered things are *The Hunchback* and *The Love Chase*, had no literary genius, and not a very strong literary talent, so that his works, useful on the boards, are lumber on the shelves. Nor does the undoubted talent, the at least not peremptorily to be denied genius of Bulwer, show at its best in his plays, *The Lady of Lyons*, *Richelieu*, *Money*, while the theatre naturally provoked an exhibition of his worst faults, floridness of expression and sentimentality.

[2] London, 1892. *Nepenthe* has been twice republished, once alone (London, 1897), and once with other poems (London, 1904) from a private issue (1890). *The Labours of Idleness* and the plays must be read in the originals.

the curious attraction of its tangled brake of poetry. *Nepenthe*, a much shorter piece and not dramatic, is in two cantos, the first dealing with Joy, the second with Melancholy, and was intended to be completed by a third on Contentment. It is partly in octosyllables, partly in lyric measures, and though far more abstract and incoherent than *Sylvia*, has the same lovely snatches of poetry, contrasted with much bombast and stutter. The apostrophe, "Oh blest unfabled Incense-tree!" and some other things, are worthy of anybody. Earlier, Darley had published in 1822 verses entitled *The Errors of Ecstasie*, and a very curious prose-and-verse medley, *The Labours of Idleness*, by "Guy Penseval" (1826), which contains in its last piece the germ of *Sylvia*. Later, he published two plays, *Thomas à Becket* (1840) and *Ethelstan* (1841), which have all his faults and hardly any of his merits. He is, on the whole, strangely premonitory of many of the poets of the century, both the "Spasmodics" of its middle period and others much later; but few of those who belong to his class have equalled his best things.

The same attraction, but in higher degree and rarer kind, is to be found in Thomas Lovell Beddoes, who was born at Clifton in 1803, and died by his own hand in 1849 at Basle. Beddoes, who was the son of a doctor of great repute, and of Maria Edgeworth's sister Anna, went to Charterhouse and Pembroke College, Oxford, but spent nearly the whole of his manhood on the Continent, where he had gone to study medicine. He was undoubtedly mad in the later part of his life, and perhaps not entirely sane at any part of it; nor did his mental disturbance take, as has often been the case with men of letters, an agreeable form. But among the small and interesting group of English poets whose great wits have suffered more than an alliance with madness, he is one of the most remarkable. Before going abroad he had published two very small volumes of verse, *The Improvisatore* and *The Bride's Tragedy*, and he had shown a great interest in poetry, clubbing with Procter and others to publish (or guarantee the expenses of publishing) Shelley's posthumous work. But the best of his own verse was posthumous (1851), and it has been reinforced since with some fragments and with Letters.[1] His chief performance, kept in hand for years and never fully completed, is a drama called *Death's Jest Book*, or *The Fool's Tragedy*, in which he takes the wildest examples of the Elizabethan period, the plays of Tourneur, for model in more than the title. Composition Beddoes has none: his larger works are mere dreams, and mostly bad dreams, with but the thinnest thread of even romantic and subjective coherence, with a total disregard of prob-

Beddoes.

[1] *Poems* (2 vols. London, 1890), *Letters* (1 vol. London, 1894), both edited by Mr. Gosse.

ability in incident, and with the characters looming half-finished through darkness and blood-tinged mist. But they contain passages, especially lyrical passages, of the most exquisite poetical beauty, and these lyrics are joined by others independently composed. "Dream-Pedlary," "The Dirge for Wolfram," the "Song from Torrismond," the "Song on the Water," "Love in Idleness," and not one or two but many others, are among the most consummate things in English. The only charge, valid as a charge, brought against them is that they are not original, and this is false as a fact. Beddoes did not copy the Elizabethan dramatists, he continued them in their own spirit; and it may be questioned whether, though we have since had far greater poets than he is, we have ever had greater poetry than his.

INTERCHAPTER X

THOSE who have followed the narrative to this point will have small difficulty in anticipating the summary of the Book just concluded. Yet it is of the first importance to appreciate exactly what happened at the beginning of the period which it covers, for this is the last definite turn—the last of the innumerable revolutions and eddies which constitute the history of English literature. Only minor changes have taken place since. Between Johnson, who died in 1784, and Coleridge, who was then ten years old, there are differences of species, almost of genus; between Coleridge and Mr. Swinburne, who was not born when Coleridge died, there are only the differences of the individual, and those of a certain accumulated experience and experiment in the same paths. From time to time bright spirits, intolerant of the traditional, try to alter the bournes of time and space in these respects, and to make out that the Classical, whatever the failings on its part, was always in its heart rather Romantic, and that the Romantic has always, at its best, been just a little Classical. There is, of course, a certain amount of truth in this: everything in the universe has its share (sometimes rather a small one) of universal quality, or it could not exist. But such observations are only of use as guards against a too wooden and matter-of-fact classification; the great general differences of the periods remain, and can never be removed in imagination without loss and confusion.

What then is this difference between "Classical" and "Romantic"? What was it that for the time succumbed, and what was it that for the time prevailed, in the battle, of which the first artillery salvo was the *Lyrical Ballads?* The question is one still unsettled, one never likely to be settled completely. Yet, amid endless individual differences, there is perhaps much more general agreement than might be supposed. In the wide sense the debate between Classical and Romantic concerns the opposite sides taken on certain theses, of which the more important are—that poetry depends upon the subject; that every kind of poetry has a prescribed or prescribable form, outside which even beauties, as La Harpe said of the beauties of Dante and Milton,

are "monstrous"; that convention, generalisation, abstention as much as possible from the fantastic, the individual, the abnormal are the best principles of literature; that definiteness, proportion, exact solution of the problem proposed, are preferable to the suggestive, the vague, the incomplete, or the irregularly beautiful.

And the English eighteenth century, with the later part of the seventeenth, had, besides taking very definite position on the Classical side in regard to these questions, added certain purely arbitrary and more or less accidental restrictions of its own. It had decided that, while human nature was to be attended to, in at least a good many of its aspects, with the most sedulous care, external nature was to be a little neglected. It had by practice always, and sometimes by precept, made curious and still more arbitrary limitations in such admittedly unessential points as metre, style, literary forms and kinds. It had, again without any necessary or logical connection, decided that very nearly all non-dramatic English literature before the middle of the seventeenth century might be neglected, and that the dramatic authors of this neglected time were a set of inspired but too often ill-behaved babies. Without formally pronouncing any decree on the subject, it had shut its eyes to almost all foreign modern literature except French and a little Italian, and had studied the very classics themselves with a curious eclecticism, postponing Greek to Latin, and arranging Latin authors themselves according to its own good pleasure.

The operation of the causes detailed piecemeal in Book IX., beginning, as usual, almost as early as the convention itself, gradually broke it up; and though it would be extremely difficult to prove that even one of the great writers of 1798-1830 deliberately planned the change all round—though Wordsworth, who certainly did plan a change, went wrong in some important particulars of revolt, and even retained some of the most dubious points of the old creed—yet the results (which, rather than the efforts, are the things to look at) followed the lines indicated above. The immense performance of these thirty years in poetry was only in the smallest degree deliberate, and when it was deliberate, as in the case of Wordsworth's "silly sooth," it was very often at its worst. The new wine shaped the bottles, when it did not burst them, by its own fermentation. Except in some metrical points—the chief of which were the *Christabel* experiment and the gradual, though by no means universal, disuse of the sharply divided couplet—very little of the poetic change began at the formal end. The accumulation of new subjects—Mediæval, Eastern, and what not; the crowd of new models—German, Old English, Celtic, true or spurious, and what not again; above all, the diversity of new talents, broke ground in every possible way in verse

As far as "orders of the day" went, the only order of importance, taken for granted if not formally pronounced, was that you might write as you liked; that it was not necessary to imitate anybody in creation; that in criticism what pleased yourself, and not what Aristotle, Horace, Pope, Johnson had laid down, was to be the rule. In so far as any one saying of any one person is the motto of 1798-1830, it is the saying of Blake, poet and painter, that in painting, and no doubt in poetry too, "every man is a connoisseur who has not been connoisseured out of his senses."

In point of genius the period is a period of poetry; in point of mere form the remarkable change in it concerns not poetry but prose. It is possible that since the death of Milton there had never been alive in England a poet of the absolutely first rank; but there had been many writers who might in prose have attained such rank if it had not been for the traditions of prose-writing. Prose even more than verse had expiated the short excesses of 1580-1660 by a period, nearly twice as long, of sober correctness, and it was now to have its fling, its series of flings, for nearly a hundred years from Landor and Wilson to Stevenson and Pater.

But the rush of new or altered kinds is almost as noticeable as the plethora of genius and the changes of literary etiquette. In poetry the land, from possessing a few sober rills, becomes a land of springs and waters; the novel, late found, develops enormously; the essay almost outstrips it in development; history fills whatever gap may be caused by the dwindling of philosophy and theology as contributors to literature; fresh varieties arise every decade, almost every year. Undoubtedly there is something of Babel in all this; the time, at any rate to living eyes, admits of no clear description; its characteristics, if they exist distinctly, have not yet emerged like those of earlier ages. But we know that it was an age of very great literature, and that it was not destined to be ill succeeded.

BOOK XI

VICTORIAN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

TENNYSON AND BROWNING

Tennyson: his early work and its character—The volumes of 1842—His later life and works—*The Princess*—*In Memoriam*—*Maud*—The *Idylls of the King*, etc.—Robert Browning—Periods of his work—His favourite method—His real poetical appeal—Edward FitzGerald—Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

THERE is no contrast of contemporaries in English Literature, not even the half-imaginary one between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, so curious as that which for some two-thirds of the nineteenth century is provided by the poetry of Alfred Tennyson and that of Robert Browning. As in the former case, the men were friends; as in that, their methods were at once curiously unlike and curiously complementary.

Tennyson, the third son of a large family, the father of which, Dr. George Tennyson, was, though disinherited, the real head of an old house, was born at his father's living of Somersby on the Lincolnshire Wolds in 1809. His elder brothers, Frederick and Charles,[1] were also poetically given, and all three collaborated in the so-called *Poems by Two Brothers* which appeared in 1826. Alfred was educated at the Grammar School of Louth, and then went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he obtained the

Tennyson: his early work and its character.

[1] Frederick, the eldest, who was born in 1807 and lived till 1898, published a volume of verse much above the average, *Days and Hours*, in 1854, and two or three more in the last decade of his long life. Charles, who was born in 1808, took the name of Turner, and died in 1879, was all but a very great master of the sonnet, and a large collection of his work in this kind appeared posthumously in 1880.

Chancellor's Prize for a poem which was altered in subject from the Battle of Armageddon to Timbuctoo. In 1830 he published a volume of Poems, of which all that he chose to save appear, with others, in the later editions as *Juvenilia*. These pieces, which were rigorously revised later, may perhaps include—with the capital exceptions of the "Ode to Memory," where the intensely accurate and yet thoroughly translated observation of the poet appears; "The Dying Swan," which is a good early example of his command of concerted metre; and "Mariana in the Moated Grange," which combines both—none of his very best and most characteristic work, unless the "Recollections of the Arabian Nights" be allowed a place. But "Claribel," the opening piece, is characteristic and original, if not best, and the other ideal girl-pieces ("Oriana" stands apart, and is better than any), the "Sea-Fairies," and still others, also appeal from this judgment. Astonishing power of visual presentation, and a still more astonishing skill of musical accompaniment, marked the poet already. But his touch was extremely uncertain; he would constantly mar it with the mawkishness and gush which Keats had learnt from Leigh Hunt and handed on; the jewelled and polished perfection of his work as we now know it simply did not exist. At the end of 1832, but with the date of 1833, he issued another volume, where the same defects of detail were relieved by a far greater height of aim and range of delivery. This contained, and indeed took title from, "The Lady of Shalott," not yet in its full perfection of tapestried scene and ringing, waving rhyme, but still beautiful already; the wonderful "Lotos-Eaters"; the great pair of picture-galleries, the "Palace of Art" and the "Dream of Fair Women"; the splendid, forceful, *new* blank verse of "Œnone"; "Mariana in the South" (the poet had made a flying visit to the Pyrenees the summer before), a marvellous pendant to the Northern; the fiery "Fatima," one of his few excursions in the line of direct passion, but a great one; the "Two Voices," a piece usually rated far too low; and the inferior and popular, but pretty, "Miller's Daughter" and "May Queen."

But in this the faults of execution still remained; and both volumes were savagely, but not quite unfairly, criticised for faults which in most cases were removed by the poet in consequence of these very criticisms. They acted, indeed, not as a killing frost, only as a frosty but kindly nip to a too precocious and exuberant growth, keeping the plant back and causing infinite improvement in flower and fruit later. For all but ten years Tennyson wrote a good deal, altered freely, but published nothing, and it was not till 1842 that he reappeared with two small volumes, one containing a selection of the earlier pieces thoroughly revised and enormously improved, the other a collection of new

The volumes of 1842.

"English Idylls and Other Poems." It is customary to fix on some of these latter as his first perfect work, and it has not been uncommon for judges of importance to put them above anything that he produced later. But nothing in the Tennysonian kind can surpass "Mariana," or the "Lotos-Eaters," or the "Dream of Fair Women." Still, it is not wonderful that such things as "Ulysses" and the first "Morte d'Arthur" confirmed old admirers and obtained hosts of new ones for the poet. The "English Idylls" of the title, "The Gardener's Daughter," "Dora," "Walking to the Mail," and others, were exceedingly popular, though they cannot be called very great poetry, exquisite as are some of the pictures in the first-named; and "The Day-Dream," and "Will Waterproof's Monologue" (the latter the poet's best light thing) also fall short of the grand style. But this is perfectly attained in "Ulysses," in the "Morte d'Arthur," in "Love and Duty," in "Locksley Hall," in the batch of other pieces, perhaps to be called Ballads for want of any better name—"St. Agnes' Eve," "Sir Galahad," "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere"—in "The Vision of Sin," and the still more exquisite batch of songs and fragments, "Break, break," "Come not, when I am dead," "The Poet's Song," and others. In these, ears not originally deaf to poetry, and not obstructed by any special prejudice, could not fail to detect the notes of a poetry newer, more individual, and richer than had been heard, except in the great writers of the generation immediately preceding, for the best part of two centuries. The main notes of this poetry, once more, were, first, the felicity of presentation of the visual picture, whether in the sharp, succinct fashion of the compartments of the "Palace" and the "Dream," or in larger groups or smaller touches; secondly, the new modulation of vowel, syllable, word, line, and stanza, so as to produce a running musical accompaniment at once to the image and to the idea. Subsidiary to the first gift was the also mentioned faculty of observation of small details of nature; to the second, a rich but not promiscuous store of words both simple and compound, and a metrical gift which showed itself in many measures, but specially in a new and magnificent kind of blank verse, ranking below, if below, Milton's only because it owes a certain amount of debt thereto. These gifts and others had not yet been set to the composition of any long poem, but had produced numerous and singularly varied handlings, in the special taste of the century, of things past and present, scenes, characters (though character was not Tennyson's forte), emotions, incidents, thoughts—each placed for itself and for ever in an eternising frame and setting of poetry.

Tennyson lived for exactly half a century after the publication of the volumes of 1842, and increased immensely the bulk, the variety,

the scale of his productions; but, as generally, though not always, happens with poets of the first rank, he produced little that was new in kind, and perhaps nothing that was at once new in kind and of the very first value. For this last estimate can certainly not be allowed either to his dramas or to his poems in Lincolnshire dialect, though the latter were very effective, and the former have received praise, higher than that generally accorded to them, from some good judges. But the success, not striking or popular, but certain, of the 1842 issue was in many ways a turning-point in his career. By degrees the sale of his verse gave him first a small, then a moderate, and latterly an ever-increasing income. Before this happened, and when his private means, which had always been very narrow, were threatened by an injudicious investment, he received a Crown pension which placed him above want. Neither at this time, nor at any other, did he ever desert poetry for lucrative avocations of any kind, even literary. He slowly elaborated the important collection of Elegies which was to appear as *In Memoriam*, and he completed, and in 1847 published, the "medley" of *The Princess*—his first long poem, his longest, if we except the congeries of the *Idylls*—the consummate expression of his mastery in blank verse, and, at least in its second and slightly altered form, with inserted songs, one of the most charming, if not one of the greatest, poems in English. The exceedingly difficult kind of the playfully-romantic, if not mock-heroic, in which it is written, is not universally relished; it is too serious for some, not serious enough for others, and prejudices of various sorts have interfered with its reception. But it is as much at the head of its own division of poetry on the Romantic side as *The Rape of the Lock* is on the Classical, and it has appeals which are unknown to Pope's glittering little masterpiece.

His later life and works.

The Princess.

Three years later, in 1850, Tennyson not only married, and was appointed Poet-Laureate in succession to Wordsworth, but published *In Memoriam*. This volume—composed of a large number of short pieces in the four-lined octosyllabic stanza rhymed *abba*, which had been sparingly employed by seventeenth-century poets, but out of which they had only by accident, and once or twice, got the full metrical value—has been often put forward as Tennyson's greatest work, and has been hotly attacked and defended as not merely a rite of friendship, but a theological eirenicon between faith and scepticism. The first judgment is one of will-worship, and the second practice is merely an instance of the apparently ineradicable habit of shrinking from the judgment of poetry as poetry, and endeavouring to drag it into another court. As poetry *In Memoriam* contains things which are equal to Tennyson's best; but

In Memoriam.

it is necessarily less varied in subject, more sombre in hue and imagery, and pervaded by an atmosphere which, when it ceases to be impressive—if it should happen to do so with this or that mood or character—becomes slightly oppressive. Its highest praise is that it applies and expresses in a new field those gifts of the poet which have been already described, and shows that, like all true poetic gifts, they are capable of universal application.

His next two works, the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* (1852) and *Maud* (1855) were rather violently attacked, as generally happens when a man has lately risen to any eminence. There is no nobler passage in the poetry of patriotism than part of the first. The second showed, and fortunately for almost the last time, that uncertainty and inequality of taste and touch, at the first time of asking, which had always distinguished the poet. Developing out of some earlier verses, "O that 'twere possible," which are still its central and most exquisite passage, it aimed at too much political and social satire in the style of Carlyle's contemporary *Latter-day Pamphlets*, denunciation of "peace at any price," commercialism, and the like, neglecting for these its legitimate theme of "love that never met its earthly close," despair, madness, and reconciliation. It was improved later, and contains some of the most passionate and echoing things that the poet ever did, but it is as far below *The Princess* in homogeneity and adjustment to its aim as it is above it in these parts. *Maud.*

The detraction died, and the next volume, the *Idylls of the King* (1859), estated Tennyson securely for the rest of his life as not merely the official but the unquestioned head of English poetry. It was devoted to the Arthurian Legend, which it treated, not consecutively, but in four episodes—the Welsh story of Geraint of Devon and his patient wife Enid, the less poetical version of Merlin's enchantment, a variant of that adventure of Lancelot which he had earlier touched in "The Lady of Shalott," and (greatest of all) the parting of Arthur and Guinevere. In later issues fresh episodes were added, and the whole was in a manner framed by a new "Coming of Arthur," and by the original and splendid "Morte" eked with less precious matter in a "Passing" to match. Next came *Enoch Arden* (1864), containing among larger but lesser things the lovely "Voyage," "Tithonus," "In the Valley of Cauteretz," and others, as well as the first of the dialect pieces alluded to. And in the nearly thirty years which remained to him Tennyson rounded off the *Idylls* to an Arthuriad in twelve books, began in 1875 and continued a series of chiefly historical plays[1] The *Idylls of the King*, etc.

[1] *Queen Mary*, 1875; *Harold*, 1877; *The Promise of May*, 1882; *Becket*, 1884; *The Cup* and *The Falcon*, 1884; *The Foresters*, 1892.

of more dubious value, and at intervals issued by themselves, or with instalments of the *Idylls*, volumes of miscellaneous verse,[1] the last of which, the *Death of Œnone*, was not published till after his own death on 6th October 1892. No one of these failed to contain things worthy of his best days, and that of 1880, called *Ballads and other Poems*, was especially rich in them, while the last issued in his lifetime, *Demeter*, closed with the marvellous swan-song of "Crossing the Bar."

He had added to English poetry a body of work which, though not the greatest contributed by any man, though falling short of Chaucer and Coleridge in fresh and original gift, of Spenser in uniform excellence and grasp of a huge subject, of Shakespeare in universality, in height and depth and every other creature, of Milton in grandeur and lonely sublimity, of Wordsworth in ethical weight and grip of nature behind the veil, of Shelley in unearthliness, and of Keats in independence and voluptuous spontaneity, yet deserves to be ranked with the best of these, except Shakespeare only, in virtue of its astonishing display of poetic art. Tennyson had never, no matter what his detractors may say, come short in poetic thought; in poetic style he had shown a uniform mastery not elsewhere to be equalled, and a quality hardly elsewhere to be surpassed. He had carried the special poetic mission of the nineteenth century in English—that of applying the powers of colour, form, and music to the investment of the largest possible number of themes with the imaginative suggestion of poetry—to a point not reached by any other, and in all his long and fertile career had never finally failed in a single application of them, putting the dramatic attempts, in which he was merely a stranger, aside. He had justified that "return to nature"—of which the danger was that it should become as conventional, as cut and dried, as the generalising away from nature which had preceded it—to a pitch, not merely by an infinity of fresh and felt observations, but by invariably touching these observations with the necessary point of generalisation itself. He is always real, but never realist; never conventional, but also never photographic. His music is more difficult to praise, because the ear is a more arbitrary sense than the eye. To those who have ears to hear there is absolutely no poet so inexhaustible and original in harmony as Tennyson. The story told in his *Life* of a hearer who knew no English, but knew Tennyson to be a poet by the hearing, is probable and valuable, or rather invaluable, for it points to the best, if not the only true, criterion of poetry.

[1] *The Holy Grail*, 1870; *Gareth and Lynette*, 1872; *Ballads*, 1880; *Tiresias*, 1885; *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, 1887; *Demeter*, 1889, were the chief of these.

The life of Robert Browning was as wholly devoted to literature as that of Tennyson, but he was rather more attracted by society; much of it was spent abroad, whereas Tennyson never left England save for trips; and it lacked the usual introductory experiences of an Englishman. Browning was born in May 1812, in the southern suburbs of London, went to no regular school, nor to Oxford or Cambridge; and though his reading was wide and appreciative, it lacked throughout his life the touch of scholarship in the full and liberal sense which distinguished Tennyson. Nor was this circumstance by any means unimportant in conditioning the peculiarities of his poetical style. His first poem was *Pauline*, written in his nineteenth and published in his twenty-first year; his next, *Paracelsus*, appeared in 1835. *Pauline*, though not consummate, is characteristic; neither the verse, nor the style proper, nor the substance, could be affiliated on anybody, except perhaps Shelley, and on Shelley to a limited extent only. Certain passages have a regular beauty not common later with the author, and assuredly not to be found in any contemporary work except that of Tennyson; but the chief interest of the piece is its early revelation of the breathless, intense, "monodramatic" manner, eschewing incident but delighting in analysis, which was to be one of the poet's points throughout, and ultimately to prevail over all the others. *Paracelsus* has far more direct charm. Here the form is openly dramatic, at least the personages speak personally. The blank verse is still more breathless and peculiar; there are lyrics showing some beauty and promising much, and the characters are projected in an entirely novel fashion.

Robert Browning.

From this time the poet's vocation may be considered as fixed; and though his public was at first smaller even than Tennyson's, and took far longer to increase, he always had his devotees, and never allowed detraction or neglect to check him. The play—a play in a manner actable and acted—of *Strafford* came in 1837; then the poem of *Sordello* (less distinguished now among its author's work, perhaps, since his last thirty years of vogue, than it was as an "awful example" or a cherished idol during the previous thirty of contempt) and the collection called *Bells and Pomegranates*, which appeared between 1841 and 1846. After the publication of the pieces contained in this last, it was no longer permissible for any catholic judge of poetry to dismiss Browning's claim to the position of a poet, true certainly, and probably great. The plays, after his own strange mode, which were included, might still have left a doubt, and sometimes more than a doubt. But the pieces called *Dramatic Lyrics*, especially "In a Gondola" and "Porphyria's Lover," should have settled the question. The public

Periods of his work.

reception was, however, still cold or totally wanting. He married the poetess Elizabeth Barrett at this time. 1850, the year of *In Memoriam*, saw the great monodramatic piece of *Christmas Eve and Easter Day;* and 1855, the year of *Maud*, the still greater *Men and Women.* In these three books Browning had taken his place once for all; and the poet of "The Last Ride Together" and "Love among the Ruins" could speak in the gate with any one, enemy or friend. He still wrote rather sparingly, and his next publication was probably checked by his wife's death in 1861, after which he returned to England. In 1864, however, came *Dramatis Personae*, the last of his middle period, and the last volume containing his very greatest work. "James Lee," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," and "Prospice" are among the greatest poems of the century. This volume, and a collected edition of the previous work which had ushered it, produced a great effect on the generation which had been growing up for Browning; and it was probably with some confidence, though with a defiant acknowledgment of his earlier, if not still existing, unpopularity, that he attempted to convert the public with one of the most audacious of advances, *The Ring and the Book* (1868), a collection of pieces in some twenty thousand lines, telling the same story over and over again so as to exhibit different personalities in a dozen different ways. The public "came to heel," and for the twenty years more during which his life lasted Browning, though still anathematised by a very few, was grudgingly tolerated by more, admitted by the general, and wildly and foolishly adored by a certain sect. He could not throw off things too rapid, too apparently crabbed, too really flimsy and ill-digested for them; and though he seldom during this time put out a book without something good in it, he did nearly as much to damage his fame as he had previously done to build it up. Fortunately, his lyric gift remained, showing itself at times charmingly, and in his last volume, *Asolando* (published at the very moment of his death in 1889), with sufficient volume and variety to end by reconciling those who had been for a time estranged by the verbiage, the pretentiousness, the real vacuity, of things like *Red Cotton Nightcap Country* (1873) and *The Inn Album* (1875); not much charmed by the inequality and *tapage* of *Balaustion's Adventure* (its companion of the year 1871, *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, is better), *Aristophanes' Apology* (1875), *La Saisiaz* (1878), *Dramatic Idylls* (1879-80), *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884), and *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance* (1887); and alternately reconciled and redisgusted by *Fifine at the Fair* (1872), *Pacchiarotto* (1876), and *Jocoseria* (1883).

Despite, however, this unfortunate inequality, or rather this unfortunate yielding to temptation, even Browning's aberrations from the

true poetic provide at least passages which are poetry. Their plan is, with an appearance of diversity, very much the same from *Pauline* to the *Parleyings*. The poet takes a character, an anecdote, sometimes little more than a name; and instead of focussing it from the outside, or making it speak in simple dramatic fashion, with such passages of ornament as he can give, he shakes it about, dissecting, or trying to dissect, its "soul," analysing its constituents, folding and unfolding it to get different lights and aspects, but never exactly summing up or giving us the whole. In this process—using as he does for the most part blank verse of great variety and vigour, but breathless, somewhat prosaic in rhythm and cadence, or else rhymed arrangements fluid enough, but with their fluency much chequered by verbal tricks, and rhyming in the most audacious, though rarely in any positively incorrect, fashion—he produces effects which perhaps seem even more formless than they are, but which certainly dispense with the exacter graces of form to an extent very unwise, if not also distinctly illegitimate for the poet. A green or a jaded taste may sometimes relish his phrase and period; but the finer palate at once declines the labour that is required, and fails to rank very high the pleasure that results.

His favourite method.

But in his shorter, and especially in his lyrical, pieces, where the imperative melody of stanza and rhyme not merely sweetens his acerbity and makes his jejuneness succulent, but applies a positive check to his verbiage, his prolixity, his headlong readiness to accept the first word that comes, Browning is usually a poet, very often a great poet, not seldom a poet almost or quite of the greatest. Some surprise was expressed when a critic, soon followed by others, designated him at his death "the poet of love," for his later worshippers had been wont to extol his "thought" and philosophy, not his passion. But the conversion of at least some of the fittest was soon effected. It is always on this subject, and on a certain optimist view of the triumph of life, that Browning is happiest, while in connection with both he has the faculty of the century for giving what Dr. Johnson scornfully called "the streaks in the tulip." "The Last Ride Together," innumerable as are the great love-poems in English from "Alison" to "Rose Mary," admits no superior and very few equals. "Rabbi Ben Ezra," the praise of age, of failure, of approaching death, the triumphant assertion of—

His real poetical appeal.

All I could never be, all men ignored in me,

is practically unique, though no doubt it owed a certain suggestion and start, such as is common with poets, to passages of FitzGerald's *Omar Khayyam* (see below). Of Browning we may say, *Timor*

mortis non conturbabat. In a hundred other pieces hardly inferior, in the browner shades of age as well as in the spring of youth, he sang, not like most poets, Love and Death, but Love and Life.

That he was a great, a consummate master of poetic music, as well as of poetic thought and vision, meets more gainsayers. It is certain that he was dangerously prone to indulgence in discords, and that for long stretches of his verse, especially in his later lucubrations, he seems to be indifferent to any music at all except that of the horse-fiddle, or at best the hurdy-gurdy. But in the class of lyrics just referred to—and even in others—there is no softness that he cannot insinuate, no crash or clangour that he cannot reach. That he too often contemns the demand of his passenger to be "carried softly along in the melodious coach" is true likewise. But when he cared to use it he had a chariot of that kind which yielded in pure voluptuous caressing movement to none, and which is perhaps all the more enjoyed when the passenger is shot into it from the jolting tumbrils of his more ordinary rolling-stock.

The almost unprecedented fashion in which these two poets at once lead and sum up the poetic production of two-thirds of a century has made it necessary to treat them at greater length than is usual in these later Books. We must now be briefer, yet not too brief, with the most remarkable of their more immediate contemporaries, the wife of the one and a very early and intimate friend of the other, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Edward FitzGerald. FitzGerald was born in 1809, at Woodbridge in Suffolk, a district which was his residence by choice as well as chance during almost the whole of his life. He was the younger son of a man of property, and spent great part of his childhood in France, but was sent to the Grammar School of Bury St. Edmunds, entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1826, and during his days there knew Tennyson only by sight, though he was intimate with Thackeray. Of independent though small means, and intolerant of general society and business, he entered no profession, and gradually settled down on the banks of the Deben, smoking, reading, dreaming, and at times using the sea a good deal, until his death on 14th June 1883. He had married, rather late in life, the daughter of Lamb's friend, Bernard Barton, the Quaker poet.

Edward FitzGerald.

FitzGerald's literary interests, though a little crotchety, were intense, and he was at different times an intimate friend of the three greatest men of letters of the Victorian age—Tennyson, Thackeray, and Carlyle; but he published comparatively little, and that little had a rather false appearance of want of originality. His delightful letters, published after his death in two collections, first made him known to the general. He had written earlier an exquisite Platonic

dialogue, of deep if not wide or commanding originality, called *Euphranor* (1851), had translated divers plays of Aeschylus and Calderon (1856), and had in 1859 issued a version, also in appearance a translation, of the *Rubaiyat* of the Persian poet, astronomer, and Epicurean, or rather Cyrenaic, Omar Khayyam. The first edition of this was published in small numbers, and did not become generally known, but its effect upon those who did become acquainted with it, and who were prepared for its reception, was extraordinary. It is not in the strict sense a translation at all, FitzGerald having combined, transposed, omitted, and even inserted, to such an extent that the thing is almost as much his own as another's. But the poetical value of it is extraordinary. The note, somewhat resembling that of the later English Renaissance as presented by Donne, but with a marked difference, showing its Oriental suggestion, is one of a musical sensuality, intensely fatalist, yet, with the usual inconsistency of fatalism, ringing the changes on *Carpe diem* as well. Nothing in English had been quite like the melancholy and voluptuous clangour of these rolling quatrains, rhymed as a rule *aaba*, with the *b* sound left ringing in the air, and not caught up in the succeeding stanza, but sometimes monorhymed throughout. His other renderings of Persian, *Salaman and Absal* and the *Bird Parliament*, less known, are only less charming.

FitzGerald did not admire Mrs. Browning. And indeed no two writers could be more unlike, in anything but devotion to literature and faculty of poetry. Elizabeth Moulton Barrett, the daughter of a wealthy West-Indian, was born in Durham on 6th March 1806, and brought up chiefly in Herefordshire, but afterwards lived much in London. She had, after her first youth, very bad health, and was an eager though rather amateurish reader and student. She published poems at nineteen, but she was thirty-two before, in a second volume, entitled *The Seraphim*, she developed a distinct poetical character; and it was not till the middle of the century was approaching, and her own fortieth year was past, that the pieces which really speak her talent appeared. In 1846 she married Robert Browning (somewhat after the fashion of an elopement). The pair lived chiefly at Florence, and had one child. In 1851 she published *Casa Guidi Windows*, and in 1857 *Aurora Leigh*, a verse novel-with-a-purpose. *Poems before Congress* came a year before, and *Last Poems* a year after, her death in 1861. Perhaps she had never done anything better than "The Great God Pan," which, written just before, appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* during its brilliant opening year under Thackeray's editorship.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

There is scarcely any writer in English deserving the name of poet

who illustrates by defect the importance of poetic style so well as Mrs. Browning. The word is constantly used in reference to poetry with a sense too general and even improper, but here it can be used with exact propriety. In all the qualities (with the exception of ear for rhyme) which distinguish the poet from the prose-writer she was a very considerable proficient, though even in these she lacked self-criticism. She could think as a poet, could feel, though rather too gushingly, as a poet, could see, sometimes with eminent clearness, as a poet should see, and in some respects had an equally eminent gift of poetic music. But in the qualities which the prose-writer shares with the poet, and the absence of which, because less common, is even more distressing in the latter, she was extraordinarily deficient. The dulness or falseness of her ear for consonance of sound was quite unparalleled, and she, with all the advantages of gentle birth, feminine sex, country breeding, and an almost scholarly education, confuses rhymes in a manner usually supposed to be limited to the lower class of cockneys. And this insensibility to pure sound finds its counterpart in slipshod and tasteless vocabulary, in awkward and solecising uses of phrase—in short, in a general slatternliness as regards all the minor, and some of the major, points that constitute style.

This carelessness or numbness of feeling extends also to some things which lie deeper than style. At hardly any time, except when the beneficent restriction of the sonnet braces her up, is Mrs. Browning's composition or her conception clear, well-knit, and orderly. This flaccidity is indeed a symptom in all the poets of the second Romantic school. It had been threatened in Keats; there were dangerous appearances of it, fortunately exorcised by the kind cruelty of criticism and his own good sense, in Tennyson; Robert Browning's verbosity, his lawless abundance, was perhaps in fact only a rather more healthy and vigorous variety of it. But over Mrs. Browning it ruled, except in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and a very few other pieces. Still, despite the constant imperfection, there is, on the whole, a pervading charm, the sense of the vision though sometimes not of the faculty. In "Cowper's Grave," in "The Rhyme of the Duchess May," in the "Lay of the Brown Rosary," in the "Romaunt of Margret" (where the different cadence given to the refrain "Margret! Margret!" by the form of the name adopted, contributes a marvellously new music to the piece, and where, terribly as the whole is in need of compression and concentration, the separate effects are sometimes quite miraculous), in the "Vision of Poets," in "The Soul's Travelling" and the "House of Clouds," in a hundred others, we never want more poetry, we only want more criticism.

A paragraph of mention must suffice for some verse-writers more than one of whom may be justly called a poet, and who were nearly contemporary with these, or at any rate born between Mrs. Browning and Mr. Matthew Arnold: the too famous Martin Farquhar Tupper (1810-89), the enormous and almost incomprehensible popularity of whose worthless *Proverbial Philosophy* has secured him an uncomfortable immortality, and who wrote much else; Archbishop Trench (1807-86), a popular philologist of great acuteness, an admirable judge of Latin Mediæval poetry, and himself a poet; Thomas Gordon Hake (1809-94), author of much verse, rather too mystical and difficult, but always high and often sweet; Richard Monckton Milnes, first Lord Houghton (1809-85), a friend of Tennyson and the immediate procurer, though at Carlyle's instigation, of his pension, a great figure in society, literary, political, and other, a good critic and an admirable song-writer; Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810-86), an Irish bard of humour as well as of romance; "Father Prout," Charles Mackay, Mrs. Archer Clive ("V")—but especially William Edmonstoune Aytoun (1813-65), joint-author of that admirable book of light verse, the equal of anything earlier and certainly not surpassed since, the *Bon Gaultier* ballads, and author of the *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers*, *Firmilian* (a parody-drama of astonishing cleverness directly ridiculing the spasmodic school, but prophetically satirising many more recent developments, and not generally rated at anything like its true value), *Bothwell*, etc. Beside *Bon Gaultier*, though of a somewhat different fashion, must be ranked the *Ingoldsby Legends* of Richard Harris Barham (1788-1845), who by birth belonged to an older generation, but wrote the *Legends* late. In grotesque poetry no language holds their superiors.

CHAPTER II

THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

Dickens—Thackeray—His early work—Charlotte Brontë—Mrs. Gaskell—Charles Reade—Anthony Trollope—George Eliot—Charles Kingsley—Others—R. L. Stevenson.

THERE can be little doubt that, great as have been its achievements in poetry and history, and not small as they have been in literary criticism and the essay generally, the nineteenth century, as a whole, will take future rank as the age of the novel. But there was a time, covering about the fourth decade of the century, when it might have seemed, and did seem to one very acute and well-informed judge (Lockhart), that the progress of fiction would be arrested. The immense impetus given by Scott appeared to be exhausted with himself; the hardly less real revolution introduced by Miss Austen was so quiet as to be very nearly imperceptible. Not a few of the novelists mentioned in the last Book were writing, and one or two, Lever and Bulwer especially, had their best work to come in 1837, and even in 1850. But between 1814 and 1836 no one of absolutely the first class put in his titles.

At this very time, however, there were breeding up, and not even in their very first youth, two of the very greatest writers of English prose fiction—perhaps, indeed, the only two who can pretend to rank with Fielding, Miss Austen, and Scott. These were Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray, who were very nearly of an age,

Dickens.

though Dickens, a little the younger of the pair, made his mark first. He was born in 1812 at Portsmouth, where, as subsequently at Chatham, his father was a clerk in the dockyard. This father, the original of the "Mr. Micawber" of *David Copperfield*, a novel in great measure autobiographical, lost his post in some departmental reconstruction; and the family for some time experienced straits which have left their mark both here and elsewhere, especially in *Little Dorrit* (for Dickens senior, like old Dorrit, was a prisoner for debt in the Marshalsea). After a time,

however, he found work on the press, as did his son, whose education was not more irregular than might be expected. Charles himself learnt shorthand and became a reporter at seventeen, but wrote, or at least published, nothing till his twenty-second year was nearly finished. At the end of December 1833 he began to contribute papers, of the descriptive-fanciful kind that Leigh Hunt had introduced, to magazines, and the *Sketches by Boz* were collected out of these and issued as a book early in 1836, while before the spring of that year was over Dickens began the *Pickwick Papers* and married. He was ever afterwards a prosperous man as far as money was concerned, and *Pickwick* immediately made him famous. He was soon able to leave off all work but book-writing; he made, by his novels, by the periodicals of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, which he edited, and by reading his own work in England and America, a very large fortune for a man of letters, and died suddenly in July 1870, the most popular author of his day, and with no failure of mental powers, though his actual death was due to brain disease.

Dickens's work was very considerable, and the book part of it, after those just mentioned (*Pickwick* was published at the end of 1837), appeared as follows:—*Oliver Twist*, 1838; *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1839; *The Old Curiosity Shop* (this and the next at first appeared with a framework, afterwards discarded, as "Master Humphry's Clock"), 1840-41; *Barnaby Rudge*, 1841; *American Notes*, 1842; *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 1843; a series of Christmas Books between the latter year and 1848 (this was continued in a way later by his contributions to the Christmas numbers of his periodicals); *Pictures from Italy*, 1845; *Dombey and Son*, 1846-48; *David Copperfield*, 1849-50; *Bleak House*, 1852-53; *The Child's History of England* (his only worthless book), 1854; *Hard Times*, same year; *Little Dorrit*, 1855-57; *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859; *The Uncommercial Traveller* (a better *Boz*), 1861; *Great Expectations*, same year; *Our Mutual Friend*, 1864-65; and the unfinished *Edwin Drood*, which was appearing when he died. Most of these, except those contributed to the two periodicals, came out in numbers with illustrations, a plan very popular in the middle of the century.

Although from the first to the last there is unmistakable unity in Dickens, and although nobody who had ever read *Pickwick* could mistake *Our Mutual Friend* for the work of any other author, his genius submitted to certain changes, without perhaps ever attaining any great expansion. He had been as a child an enthusiastic student of Smollett, and Smollett's peculiar construction, or absence of construction, was reproduced exactly in his earlier work, and did not disappear from his later. Nor, though this is less generally known, does he owe much less to Theodore Hook, who influenced his early

novels as much as Hunt influenced his early essays. *Pickwick* itself is merely the picaresque adventure-novel in a modern, more good-natured, and slightly softened and exalted form—a set of scenes hardly connected at all except by the presence of the same figures in them. If *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* have some approach to greater unity, it is only because of the melodramatic interest of the fortunes of Nancy in the first case and the poetical justice of the downfall of Squeers in the second. Even *Martin Chuzzlewit*, nay, even *David Copperfield*, are chronicles merely. *The Old Curiosity Shop* is not even this; it depends sentimentally upon Little Nell, really on the immortal Dick Swiveller. *Dombey and Son* attempts something but does not succeed. From *Bleak House* onwards Dickens did make a strong effort at connected plots—plots sometimes, as in the case of *Little Dorrit* and even *Bleak House* itself, so elaborate as to be in parts unintelligible. But, either as a consequence or as a concomitant of this, the separate scenes and characters lost a great deal of their early freshness and ease, though the real appeal, the real merit, of the books always lay in them.

If we examine Dickens carefully, and without prepossessions, we shall find certain gifts the presence of which cannot reasonably be disputed, and certain grave faults or lacks nearly as certain as the merits. No writer has ever had a more marvellous faculty of depicting what may be called town-scenery than Dickens. He can give the interior of a house or room, the "atmosphere" of furniture, the general air of a street, as no one had given these things before him. Further, he can people these scenes with figures which at their best have a vivacity, an arresting power, again inferior to none. And he can adjust scenes and figures for several purposes, but above all for the purpose of humorous action tending slightly to the farcical, with a felicity in his earlier and better days almost unerring, and even in his later seldom far out. Yet it has been questioned whether the life with which his scenes and characters are provided is altogether human life—whether his world is not rather a huge phantasmagoria of his own creation.

His main faults again are hardly denied, save by extravagant adorers. Dickens's range of character, though extensive, was also peculiar and strictly limited. He certainly did not draw, with any success, persons beyond the lower and the lower middle classes; and the defence sometimes put, that he did not wish to do so, must be ruled out, for he tried and failed to do it. His characters of the upper and upper middle classes (with whom, it must be remembered, he had, in the time when he was "making himself," hardly associated at all, while later he was too busy, too much set in one groove, and it may be too prejudiced, to study them with impartiality) have

not merely the fantastic quality, the doubtful reality of his Sam Wellers and his Dick Swivellers. They are not creatures who, in another and slightly altered world, might be real, and are still delightful; but monsters not suited to any conceivable scheme. The relations of the second Mrs. Dombey (except Cousin Feenix, who is at least a genial improbability), the society of the Dedlocks, the guests of the Dorrits in their prosperity, and some of those of the Veneerings, have hardly a touch of life—they are to the human species what the fancy birds and beasts, by creating which the late Mr. Waterton used to amuse himself and display his skill in taxidermy, were to the actual fauna of this earth. Nor is it reasonably deniable that Dickens had many irritating mannerisms, a lack of anything like real acquaintance or sympathy with great and high regions of thought, and an unfortunate proneness to talk about what he did not understand. But he remains the greatest fantastic novelist of England, and, with Balzac, the greatest fantastic novelist of the world; and his three best books, which may be taken to be *Pickwick*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*, are the masterpieces of their special kind.

Thackeray.

William Makepeace Thackeray was born at Calcutta (where his father, a cadet of a family originally of Yorkshire, and grandson of a headmaster of Harrow, was a Company's servant) in July 1811. His father died when he was five years old, and his mother marrying again, the boy was sent home, and after living at Tunbridge Wells and afterwards in Devonshire, went to Charterhouse. He proceeded in 1829 to Trinity College, Cambridge, but took no degree. He contributed, however, to an undergraduates' paper, *The Snob*, and parodied Tennyson's "Timbuctoo," or at least wrote a burlesque poem in competition with it, the first couplet of which is a pleasant foretaste of his style all through life—

> In Africa—a quarter of the world—
> The men are black, their locks are crisp and curled.

After leaving Cambridge he travelled in Germany, and began to read for the Bar; but the loss of a competent, though not large, income which he had inherited, made some more speedily remunerative occupation necessary, and he took to journalism, sinking most of his remaining property in running, instead of merely writing for, papers. He went to Paris, where his mother and stepfather were living, to study painting, for he was much more set on art than even on literature, and had, as his illustrations show, great, though curiously warped and incomplete, ability therefor. He married in 1836, and settled after a time in London, writing busily for all sorts of papers from the *Times* and *Fraser* downwards. But, after the birth of his

third child, his wife's mind gave way, and she never recovered, though she survived him for some thirty years.

His early work.

Despite what seems, on looking back, the unmistakable, and indeed unique, quality of Thackeray's most immature work, it was very long before it attained popular recognition, while it never at any time brought him anything like the substantial rewards earned by Dickens. But, while the latter never much excelled his first distinct essay, it was years before Thackeray gave his full measure. His first book, the *Paris Sketch Book*, published in 1840, and consisting of reprints of his work as a Paris correspondent for newspapers, is extremely unequal, much of it mediocre, some poor, and very little of the best. It had no success, nor had the much more characteristic collection of *Tales* which followed next year, though this contained the *Yellowplush Papers*,[1] the admirable extravaganza of *Major Gahagan*, and *The Bedford Row Conspiracy*, a story owing a little to Charles de Bernard, but a masterpiece in itself. *Catherine*, *The Hoggarty Diamond*, and *The Shabby Genteel Story* had the same inequality; while *Barry Lyndon*, though it has long been fashionable to rank it very high, attracted no great attention at first, and to some of Thackeray's most fervent admirers has always seemed chiefly noticeable as his first display of that extraordinary faculty of simulating, or rather re-creating, eighteenth-century thought and feeling which he afterwards showed. The *Irish Sketch Book* of 1843, though a book almost peerless in its kind, did not please greatly, nor the admirable *From Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, or *Eastern Sketches*, of three years later. Thackeray had reached the full limit of thirty-five before thriving in any real literary sense seemed possible for him.

But his luck was now turned by three different publications—the charming trifle of *Mrs. Perkins's Ball* (1847), which seems at last to have converted the public coldness into appreciation; the wonderful *Book of Snobs* (1848), published in *Punch;* and most of all the great novel of *Vanity Fair* (1848). This last, though at first coldly received, and perhaps not at first displaying its full quality, could not fail to win over whatever critics there may have been in England (which, by the way, as it happened, was at the particular moment by no means overstocked with that article). By the beginning of 1848, Thackeray was established, in the estimate of the best judges, as the greatest living novelist, and he had made himself popular enough to secure profit as well as fame. He lectured a little, and the lectures gave the admirable essays, rather than lectures, known as *The English Humourists* and *The Four Georges* (not pub-

[1] The "Yellowplush *Correspondence*" had appeared even before the "Paris" book in 1838.

lished till later). He continued his Christmas books. But it was of more importance that he also continued his great series of novels. *Pendennis* (1849-50), which followed *Vanity Fair*, was a more amusing and genial, if not a greater, book than its forerunner; and *Esmond* (1852), which followed *Pendennis*, is among the very summits of English prose fiction, exquisitely written in a marvellous resurrection of eighteenth-century style, touched somehow with a strange modernity and life which make it no *pastiche*, containing the most brilliant passages of mere incident, and, above all, enshrining such studies of character, in the hero and heroine in particular, but also in others, as not four other makers of English prose and verse can show.

After a tour to America, Thackeray produced *The Newcomes* (1853-55), a book resembling *Pendennis*, with which it was connected by the reappearance of some personages, but with more pathos, though perhaps a little less freshness. He had a bad attack of Roman fever in the winter of 1855, and it is believed that his health was permanently affected; but this stay at Rome saw the writing of *The Rose and the Ring*, the last and best of his extravaganza-romances. *The Virginians*, the novel of the next two years (in one of which he stood for Oxford and was beaten), exhibited something of the inequality of his earlier work, but has much of the excellence of the later. At the beginning of 1860, he undertook the editorship of the new *Cornhill Magazine*, a task in itself very uncongenial to him. He contributed to it, however, the *Roundabout Papers*, which show him to the very last at his very best as an essayist; and furnished it with the slight but amusing novel of *Lovel the Widower*, and the much longer but much less good *Adventures of Philip*. He gave up the editorship after two years, but began and carried some way a third novel, the unfinished *Denis Duval*. In this, the old faculty of re-creation, as regards scenes, manners, and speech, is unimpaired, but the book is hardly long enough to give ground for judging whether the old wizardry of character-drawing would have been retrieved. He was found dead in his bed at his house in Kensington on Christmas Eve, 1863.

Both in prose and in verse (for in a certain humorous-pathetic variety of the latter he displayed gifts which very nearly, if they do not quite, give him positive and high rank as a poet) Thackeray's characteristics, both of conception and expression, are wonderfully distinct and extremely original. During his lifetime some foolish persons called him cynical; since his death, others not more wise have called him a sentimentalist. Both judgments were complementary exaggerations of the fact just glanced at, that his is the extremest known development of that mixture of the pathetic and the

humorous which is latent in all humour, which Shakespeare had brought out occasionally—as he brought out everything—which had been driven in and turned to a furious indignation by unhappy fate in Swift, and which both the time and his own temperament had allowed only occasionally to appear in Fielding. An intense appreciation of the ludicrous aspects of actual human life exists in Thackeray, not so much alternately as side by side with an equally intense appreciation of "the pity of it." At times he may shock the weak, at times he may disgust the strong; but hardly ever in his master-work is there a real excess in either direction. The verse, as usual with the higher form, gives the simplest and best expression of this mixture, as in such pieces as the "Ballad of Bouillabaisse," "The Age of Wisdom," "Vanitas Vanitatum," and others; but it constantly suffuses the larger and better part of the prose with a "humanity" not so much "terrible," though FitzGerald called it so, as wonderful.

This peculiarity of thought, however, he shares; his peculiarity of expression is, as always with the greatest ones of literature, wholly his own. Owing to whatever cause—for his education was not irregular, and his literary taste was exquisite—Thackeray was at first a rather "incorrect" writer, in the school sense, and he never became a very correct one; but this was of the slightest possible importance. We can see in his very earliest writings a peculiarity of phrase, of style in the greatest sense, which is nowhere discernible before him, though its easier and more tangible mannerisms have been copied by some after him. It is an extremely conversational style, and at even its highest pitches it always seems to be addressed to a listener, rather than, like some of the great literary styles, those of Shakespeare's soliloquies in particular, to be composed without reference to reading or hearing at all. Thackeray always presupposes an interlocutor or at least an auditor, and in so far as we can lay the finger on any really formative peculiarity of his style, it is this, that he is constantly meeting, as it were, the fancies, objections, assents, and the like which he supposes to arise in this double of himself. This peculiarity is observable not more in his elaborate digressions of "address to the reader" (suggested, as no doubt they were, by Fielding's more set exordia) than in the smallest turns of his phrase in novel or essay alike. His play on words—a point in which he is again Shakespearian—his broken sentences, the rapid zigzag turns of his thought and fancy, are all due, partly at least, to this intense excitement of brain, which overhears beforehand, as it were, the coming repartee, comment, annotation, and half annexes, half parries it ere it arrives. It follows from this that there is no phrase in English so nervous, so flutteringly alive, as

Thackeray's. It stands at the very opposite pole from such other phrase as Landor's, which is complete, majestic, imposing, but a very little *dead*—to be contemplated, to be even received with respect and admiration by the reader, but separated from him by a gulf. Whereas between Thackeray and his reader there is a constant pulse and current of sympathetic feeling and thought. The reader knows that the author is all attention to know what he will think, what he will feel, and he is all the more sensitive to the thoughts and the feelings of the author. If we find this anywhere before in English literature, we find it in the great fantasts—Burton and Browne—of the seventeenth century, and just before Thackeray in Charles Lamb, from whom, if from anybody, he may have derived hints for it. It may also be noticed that he was a constant student of Howell, who has it in a far inferior degree, but after something the same kind as his greater contemporaries. These gifts, and that other singular one of simulating the style of former times, do not fully explain Thackeray's mastery, but they are historically noticeable. They would not have made him what he is, the recorder for ever of the higher English life in the middle nineteenth century, and the creator, in that period and out of it, of Becky Sharp and of Beatrix Esmond; but they helped him to be this, and they made him one of the very greatest of English writers.

The determination of genius and talent towards the novel, of which these two great writers were the greatest and earliest expression, affected, as we have said, older men like Bulwer and Lever, and extracted from them better work than they had at first produced. But it was, naturally, shown with more distinctness in younger men and women, who may in some cases have imitated Dickens or Thackeray directly, but who in most were not their children so much as their younger brothers and sisters.

Among the earliest of these was Charlotte Brontë, a novelist whose life has received rather disproportionate and even unfortunate attention, but whose work is still very variously judged, and in fact, from its peculiarities of circumstance, will probably always remain a problem. She was born in 1816, the daughter of a clergyman of Irish extraction, but beneficed in Yorkshire, and she had two younger sisters, Emily and Anne. The three in 1846 published a volume of poems under the names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. It attracted no attention, and, so far as Charlotte's and Anne's verse was concerned, did not deserve any. But Emily had a narrow intense vein of poetry in her, and her "Remembrance" and one or two other things are almost great. They then tried prose fiction, Charlotte writing *The Professor*, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*, and Anne, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and

Charlotte Brontë.

Agnes Grey. These two last are ordinary things; *Wuthering Heights* an extraordinary one, though its merits may be variously judged; *The Professor* did not in the least give Charlotte's quality, and she could not get it published. Nor was she at first more fortunate with *Jane Eyre*, which, however, was at last[1] accepted by Messrs. Smith and Elder, and issued in 1847. It was extravagantly attacked for "impropriety" and other crimes, but was popular. Yet its author, though she lived seven or eight years longer, wrote little more, *Shirley* in 1849, and *Villette* in 1852, neither of them long books, being her only completed work. She married Mr. Nicholls, who was her father's curate at Haworth, in 1854, and died next year on the 31st of March. *The Professor* also found its way at last into print, but her "remains" were quite fragmentary.

It will thus be seen that the circumstances of Miss Brontë's work are rather peculiar. Critics have often to judge from a small amount of work, when the author has been precocious and has died young. But Charlotte Brontë published nothing of importance till she was past thirty, and though she was not far off forty when she died, and had a great success to encourage her, increased her work but little. In such a case it may at least be doubted whether longer life would have given much more work or whether there was indeed much more to come.

But other and more intimate features also point to the same inference. Of the talent—in fact of the genius in a certain flawed and limited sense—of "Currer Bell" there can be no doubt. She followed no one, and many have followed her. Her work stands in the middle of the century, obviously transitional, distinguished as much from Thackeray and from Dickens by a curious spirit of irregular and stunted romanticism, as from the romantics proper by a realist touch no less unmistakable.

And yet her limitations are extraordinary. It seems as if, unless in the grim-grotesque of parts of *Jane Eyre*, she could never get beyond her personal experiences. The exacter and less dreamy part of *Jane Eyre* itself is merely a half-vindictive record of her sufferings as a school-girl and a governess. *Shirley* is, in the heroine, a portrait of her sister Emily; Caroline, it is believed, was another, hardly less direct; the curates and their chiefs are a series of almost libellous likenesses. *Villette* reproduces her stay in Brussels with the same audacious fidelity. When she cannot copy she can only dream.

This indicates, if not a grave fault, at any rate a distinct want in

[1] *Note to Second Edition.*—This statement has been challenged as inaccurate. If so, the inaccuracy is Charlotte Brontë's own. "C. Bell" wrote to George Lewes on 6th November 1847: "Jane Eyre was rather objected to *at first* on the same grounds, but *finally* found acceptance."

her artistic nature. The transcript of personal experience is not only a legitimate, but an almost invariable, part of the novelist's resources. We have it in Fielding as in Smollett, in Sterne as in Miss Burney, in Miss Austen as in Scott, in Dickens as in Thackeray. But the novelist cannot, like the poet, "look in his heart," and his memory, and write exclusively. The result, save in a person of almost supernatural experience and quite supernatural character, must be monotonous, and can hardly fail, even in its monotony, to be scanty. Every life (it has been said in many forms) will give one book if the liver knows how to write it; but few lives indeed will give more than one.

There are other things in this curious writer which might be noted as faults, as well as some which might be set to her credit. But her great merit is that she really did *initiate*. We had the picaresque novel, the romance of adventure, the prose comedy of manners and character, the extravaganza, the historical novel, the novel intensely domestic. She introduced a new cross and blend which was at once domestic and romantic, analytic and imaginative, pathetic and ethical—the novel neither namby-pamby nor goody-goody, nor idly handling sham terrors, nor clumsily, and without magic, trying to emulate the Great Magician's dealings with the past, nor decorating the present with mawkish sentiment and third-hand rhetoric. In a word, she showed the way, though in her own work she hardly discovered the country.

Mrs. Gaskell.

She was followed, and pretty close, by a group of remarkable novelists, most of whom cannot be said to have owed each other anything, because they were very nearly of the same age. The eldest of the group, who became the biographer of Charlotte Brontë herself, was not the most remarkable, though she has her partisans. This was Elizabeth Stevenson, a name in which few will recognise Mrs. Gaskell. She was born in 1810 at Chelsea, but was brought up at Knutsford, near Manchester, and in 1832 married a Unitarian minister of that city. Her first novel of importance, *Mary Barton* (1848), was also almost the first attempt (though Disraeli had touched the subject in his meteoric way in *Sybil*, and others otherwise) to make the lower life of a great manufacturing town, faithfully pictured, into the substance of a novel, rather in the way in which Miss Austen had used the life of English parsonages and manor-houses than in the fantastic manner of Dickens. It was a great and a deserved success. *Ruth*, five years later, develops the more theatrical side of the talent shown in *Mary Barton*, but *Cranford*, its contemporary (1853), is nearer to the actual subjects and manner of the mistress—for there can be very little doubt that it would hardly have been what it is if *Emma* had not been written,

though Mrs. Gaskell replaced the slightly merciless satire of the original with an amiable sympathy, less potent but hardly less agreeable. Of the books which followed, till her death in 1865, *North and South* (1855), and *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), with the unfinished *Wives and Daughters* (1866), may be especially mentioned. In *Mary Barton* the labour-troubles of her scene give her something of the extraordinary interest and excitement to which the elder novelists had thought it almost obligatory to have recourse; but in most of her other work she dared the dangers of the obvious, and found them vain.

Next in order of birth was a slightly eccentric but very powerful tale-teller, Charles Reade, who tried all styles, and never did anything commonplace in any, though perhaps he never turned out an actual masterpiece. He was born in 1814, at Ipsden in Oxfordshire, of a family of the squirearchy, became a Demy and then in due course a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and was called to the Bar, but neither practised nor took up any regular employment. After the manner of a French rather than of an English man of letters he began with play-writing, which he never gave up, though he was not more successful in producing literary drama than most of his contemporaries; and he did not make his mark as a novelist till he was nearly forty, when, in 1852, he published *Peg Woffington*. Thenceforward he was a frequent, but not too frequent, producer of novels, which he wrote on the modern system of "document"-collecting—gathering from newspapers and books every particular, about things past or present, that he thought might give principal or auxiliary interest to his tales, but infusing into each touches of remarkable idiosyncrasy. His best books beyond all question are *It is Never too Late to Mend* (1856) and *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861): the one a story, first of brutality towards prisoners in gaols, and then of the new Australian gold-fields; the other a wonderful adaptation, in the special spirit of the later nineteenth century, of the *Colloquies* and other autobiographical or semi-autobiographical writings of Erasmus, which are drawn upon to give a romantic picture of that humanist's father. But it may be questioned whether the already-mentioned *Peg Woffington* and *Christie Johnstone* (1853), also an early piece, to which may be added *Love me Little, Love me Long* (1859), do not show him at his very best, if they are not his very best *books*, because they are less overladen than the others, and still less than his later works from *Griffith Gaunt* (1863) to *A Woman-Hater* (1877), with "purpose," with "document," with episode, and with digression. He died in 1884.

Charles Reade.

Yet another year, and in 1815 was born Anthony Trollope, a

novelist immensely prolific, popular for a time, though not quite till his death, a good deal underrated since, never perhaps rated or likely to be rated by good critics among the first, but sure with such critics, sooner or later, of recognition as interesting and singularly typical. He belonged to a literary family, for his mother was herself a popular and prolific novelist, and his elder brother, Thomas Adolphus, was a miscellaneous writer of industry and merit, chiefly on Italian subjects. Anthony himself, though he went for a time to two great public schools—Winchester and Harrow—was rather irregularly educated on the whole, and entered the public service early, reaching a high position in the Post Office, and deriving not a few of his scenes and characters from his experiences there. He had also a rather wide knowledge of different kinds of English upper middle-class society and of some of the lower, was an enthusiastic fox-hunter, knew London society, literary and other, well, and at the same time had a knowledge of the peculiar and characteristic life of cathedral towns which would not have disgraced Fielding or Miss Austen. After some initial experiments, in which he did not show himself at his full strength, he began in 1855 to make his mark with *The Warden*, and made it unmistakably a little later with *Barchester Towers*, which wants only a *je-ne-sais-quoi* to be one of the greatest English novels. The new development of magazines, with serials running through them instead of appearing separately in parts, exactly suited Trollope's business-like fashions of composition, and contributed enormously to his profit, though it may be doubtful whether it did not injure his fame by tempting him to over-production. He lived too long even for his profit, and he wrote far too much for his fame; but his truth to life, and not merely to external life, was extraordinary, his fertility in scene and character wonderful, and his positive power far greater than it has recently been usual to admit. As the prince of a whole class of novelists who have flourished throughout the later nineteenth century, he at least must occupy a representative position when the rest of his tribe are forgotten; and it is by no means impossible that some who go to him merely out of the curiosity aroused by this representative position will continue to read him for his intrinsic merit.

Anthony Trollope.

1819 saw the birth of two greater writers, though the uncertainty of reputation which seems to affect the novelist more than any other class has attacked them too, especially the elder. Mary Ann Evans, later Mrs. Cross, known in literature as George Eliot, was born at Arbury, in Warwickshire, and till the age of thirty lived in the same neighbourhood. She wrote, or at least published, nothing early, but, having altered her religious

George Eliot.

views, translated Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, and in 1849 went abroad to Geneva. When she returned she began writing for the *Westminster Review*, her essays, reviews, and some further translations of anti-Christian work, showing ability, but no very great talent, and not even an approach to genius. But she met, was attracted by, and in a short time went to live with George Henry Lewes (1817-78), a somewhat Bohemian man of letters, of great attainments and remarkable critical power, who, though apparently unable to produce original work of merit himself, seems somehow to have discovered, developed, or accidentally started the faculties of his companion. The tales called *Scenes of Clerical Life* began to appear in *Blackwood's Magazine* at the beginning of 1857, and next year the more ambitious novel of *Adam Bede* was published. The humour, pathos, and uncopied distinction of this, hit both the critical and the public taste of the moment, and the author (who retained her pseudonym, though attempts to claim the credit of her work made it necessary before very long to disclose her identity) strengthened her position by *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Silas Marner* (1861). There are those who think that, had she died at this time, her reputation would have been less exposed to danger than it has actually proved to be; and it is certain that in all her novels after this time there is a shifting of the ground from the humorous-pathetic treatment of the lower or lower-middle provincial classes, which had hitherto been her stronghold, and of which she had perhaps exhausted the capabilities. But public taste came for a time more and more to her, and *Romola*, an Italian Renaissance story (1863), *Felix Holt* (1866), and *Middlemarch* (1871) were novels which brought in more fame and more profit than any of their time. Indeed this last, appearing as it did just at the time when an *engouement* (as the French term it) for undogmatic religion, unconventional morality, and apparently free thought had set in, made her a sort of coterie-idol. It was for a time almost treason to "culture" not to admire her. Then the tide turned, and though her next and last novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), had a great sale, yet its rather preposterous subject (the delight of a supposed young English gentleman in finding out that he is really a Jew), and the appalling semi-scientific jargon in which it was written, turned most tastes against it. Miss Evans's only later work (her marriage with Mr. Cross took place after Mr. Lewes's death in 1878, and shortly before her own) was the *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), and was better than it seemed to be, but was not popular. Her posthumous memoirs (she died at the end of 1880) were rather instructive as biography than interesting as literature.

In the years which have passed since her death, though her works are believed still to be widely read, her repute with the critics has

decreased out of all proportion to her real merits, though in pretty exact proportion to the extravagant heights to which the same critics or their likes had formerly raised it. This factitious height she can never recover in the estimate of a competent judgment. But it is probable that her four first books in fiction,[1] with passages in all her later, will gradually recover for her, and leave her safely established in, a high position among the second class of English novelists, those who have rather observed than created, rather unlocked a hoard of experience than developed a structure of imagination, who have no very good or attractive style, but write clearly and with knowledge. And the most saving grace of all will doubtless be found in her humour, a variety of that great gift which is not itself of the greatest, being partial, entirely absent at times, and never of the most abounding or original even at its best, but real, true, and at times singularly happy. The same description, though in a less degree, will apply to her pathos.

Charles Kingsley, a little George Eliot's senior (he was born in the same year, but earlier, at Holne in Devonshire), might almost be described as the counterpart, complete in difference, of that remarkable woman. He had the poetry, the eloquence, the varied glow and colour, the interest in active life, sport, travel, adventure, which she lacked; but he was destitute of the philosophical aptitudes which, not always to her peace, she possessed. And though it would be almost as untrue to represent him as destitute of the power of creating character as it would be to represent her as destitute of that of depicting incident, yet he is eminently the romancer, she eminently the novelist of their respective time, the features of which each reflected with uncommon though divergent fidelity.

Charles Kingsley.

Kingsley went first to King's College, London, then to Magdalene College, Cambridge, obtained first the curacy and then the rectory of Eversley in Hampshire, and spent there a busy and happy, though not very long, life, which closed in 1875. Besides his living, he held at different times a canonry of Middleham, the Professorship of Modern History at Cambridge, canonries of Chester and Westminster, and a chaplaincy to the Queen. And he was busy, all his life, with literary work rather unusually excellent, considering its variety in kind. His verse is not voluminous, but his *Saint's Tragedy* (1848) is much above the average of the semi-dramatic work of the century, and the small volume, *Andromeda and other Poems* (1858), which chiefly contains the rest of his work outside

[1] She wrote a good deal of verse, of very little merit as poetry, though touched occasionally with a certain fervour of undogmatism and other will-worships.

prose, includes in the title-poem the best, and almost the only good, continuous hexameters in the English language; some of the most exquisite songs for music—"The Three Fishers," "The Starlings," "The Sands of Dee," and others—that have ever become popular; ballads, from "The Last Buccanier" and "The Red King" downward, of extraordinary force and fire; and not one single bad thing, nor hardly a weak one, in the whole volume. His sermons, in the plainer kind, are of singular goodness; his miscellaneous essays of unusual interest and brilliancy, except when definitely critical, a function for which his prejudices, and his defect in logical power, together with a certain tendency to inaccuracy of fact, unfitted him. He was for the same reasons not very successful as a historical writer, and on one unfortunate occasion, engaging in controversy with nearly the most formidable controversialist of the century, Cardinal Newman, he experienced a discomfiture which was rather due to the blundering of his tactics than to the weakness of his case. But his special vocation was fiction, and though his failings and inequalities appear fully in his novels, those readers are to be pitied who are prevented by them from enjoying work which sometimes approaches, if it does not actually equal, the very best in English, and never leaves the reader long without brilliant consolations for any disappointment it may have inflicted. Kingsley began life as an enthusiastic Carlylian, but with a belief in "the people" which he certainly did not learn from Carlyle; and though his early crude "Christian Socialism" was a little toned down by experience, it left him to the last a politician more generous than exactly wise. At first, however, it helped to inspire, just after the great Chartist year of 1848-49, two novels—*Alton Locke* (1849) and *Yeast* (1851), the one embodying his experiences of University life and of the slums of London, the other touching on Tractarianism, English country life, sport, and passing politics, all blended with a passionate love-story—which will bear comparison with the first attempts of any writer. Indeed, prose fiction had never given anything like the splendid pictures of *Yeast*, inspired partly, no doubt, by Mr. Ruskin, though Kingsley was far above mere copying. The power shown in these books was applied, in perhaps increasing measure, to a dangerous subject, the break-up of the Roman Empire, in *Hypatia* (1853), a book of extreme brilliancy, where the author almost entirely eluded the curse that rests on most classical novels. But the full range and reach of Kingsley's faculty was not seen till *Westward Ho!* (1854), a novel of Elizabethan adventure, written in the full glow of that return of patriotic fervour which came upon Englishmen with the Crimean War, exhibiting hardly any of his defects, and on a wonderfully sustained level of excellence. Some

have found it "dull," while others, or even the same, have been offended by its religious, political, and national enthusiasm. The last is not a literary objection; the first can best be compared with Gabriel Harvey's opinion of "that Elvish Queene." Kingsley was never again at his best except in the best parts, which are not the whole, of the delightful fantasy of *The Water-Babies* (1863), where his magnificent descriptive power, his poetic fancy, and his not quite trustworthy, but at best exquisite, blend of humour and pathos find scope. *Two Years Ago* (1857), a modern novel referring to the time of the Crimean War itself, mingles good and bad in an unsafe proportion; and *Hereward the Wake* (1866), a new rendering, with additions, of the adventures of the historical or legendary defender of the East Anglian fens against William the Conqueror, does the same thing in different material. In inequality Kingsley has few equals, in goodness not many more superiors.

Others.

His brother[1] Henry (1830-76) had some of his merits, was a better humourist, and perhaps a better novelist, if not so good a romancer; but he had to write for bread, and never succeeded, save perhaps once in the Australian novel of *Geoffrey Hamlyn* (1859), in doing himself justice so far as an entire book is concerned. But his best and most charming things are to be found in *Ravenshoe* (1862), which, chaotic as a novel, contains character, humour, and chivalry that would do credit to the very greatest. Wilkie Collins, who was born in 1824, and died in 1889, was the son of an estimable painter of the English school, was a friend and close follower of Dickens, and, during the time between 1850 and 1870 chiefly, composed novels, *The Dead Secret* (1857), *The Woman in White* (1860), *No Name* (1862), *The Moonstone* (1868), etc., which had a great deal of popularity, and may be said to stand about midway between Dickens's and Charles Reade's in kind, but a good deal below both in humorous and romantic quality. Wilkie Collins, however, was in pure literary gift inferior to his brother, Charles Alston, who did various things, especially the *Cruise upon Wheels*, a sort of new "Journey," neither wholly sentimental nor wholly humorous, which has a singular combination of truth with fanciful grace. Other novelists, Mrs. Craik, Major Whyte-Melville, "the author of *Guy Livingstone*" (that is to say, G. A. Lawrence), Frank Smedley, can but receive the notice of bare inclusion. But a little more is due to Margaret Oliphant Wilson, Mrs. Oliphant (1828-97), who is among women novelists the parallel to Anthony Trollope among men for prolific

[1] A third brother, George, was part author with the Earl of Pembroke of a remarkable record of their South Sea experiences, *South Sea Bubbles, or The Earl and the Doctor*.

and popular production, for diffused talent, and for having at one period (in her case that of the *Chronicles of Carlingford* (1863-66), as in his of the *Chronicles of Barset*) shown something like genius. Mrs. Oliphant too, like Trollope, but more copiously, wrote things outside fiction, and her last work, the posthumous *House of Blackwood*, was a singularly successful attempt in a very difficult kind.

Not a few other novelists of merit—the greatest of them Mr. George Meredith (d. 1909)—outlived the nineteenth century, and so (see *Preface* (note) to this volume) are not for us here, while others still survive. But the work of them all exhibited, in different degrees and blends, that characteristic of the novel, as it was reconstituted towards the middle of the century, which has been noticed above—the preference (with occasional divergencies and flights into the historical, the fantastic, and other varieties) of strictly ordinary life. It so happened, however, that at a still later period, and when a third generation had grown or was growing up, popular taste veered somewhat round to the adventurous, and in the strict sense romantic. One of the earliest and most remarkable of these died some years before the close of the century, and therefore falls to be noticed in this place.

R. L. Stevenson.

This was Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson, who dropped his third name on his title-pages. He was born on 13th November 1850, was educated at Edinburgh, and called to the Bar, but had tastes neither for science nor for the professions, and before long took to wandering and literature, which remained his occupations during the too brief remainder of his life. He did not make himself very early known, and, perhaps because he was somewhat slow in settling to his real vocation of romance, the public did not find him out for some time after he actually presented himself. Before 1883 he had published five volumes, partly reprinted matter.

The first two of these were accounts of eccentric travels, *An Inland Voyage* (1878) and *Travels with a Donkey* (1879); then followed two others of essays, *Virginibus Puerisque* (1881) and *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* (1881); only at the tail (1882) came *New Arabian Nights*, which he had contributed earlier to a periodical called *London*. The first four were less noticeable for their matter (though a strong originality, a pleasant humour, and a great faculty of enjoyment were all evident in them) than for a style sometimes curiously "tormented," never entirely free from labour, but always of the most ambitious kind, and constantly on the verge of a success, from which it was only debarred by the prominence of struggle and reminiscence. The last, with something of this also, showed a daring fancy, a command both of the grotesque and the

terrible, in short a hold on the true Romantic, which escaped the vulgar judgment, but was unmistakable to those who could see. Both appeals were combined, and forced home upon the most careless reader, in the famous story of *Treasure Island*, which appeared at last in 1883, and established Mr. Stevenson's reputation.

He lived eleven years longer, wandering, partly in search of health (he was hopelessly consumptive) and partly from natural errantry, all over the world, till he finally fixed himself in Samoa, where he became a sort of white chieftain, interested himself, with characteristic intensity and half-conscious whim, in native politics, and died suddenly in the winter of 1894. He had in the interval published, sometimes in ostensible collaboration, many volumes of prose, and three of verse.

These last, *A Child's Garden of Verse* (1885), *Underwoods* (1887), and *Ballads* (1889), had the note of not always quite disengaged originality, which he could not help giving, but do not show him to the same advantage as does the prose of *Prince Otto* (1885), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), *Kidnapped* (1887), *The Black Arrow* (1888), *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), and *Catriona*, the second part of *Kidnapped* (1893). This was his last completed story, and perhaps his best. At his death he was engaged on two others, which he left unfinished, *Weir of Hermiston*, an altogether masterly fragment, where the presence of his native soil, and the strong character of the apparently intended story, seemed likely to have got him free altogether from his trammels; and *St. Ives*, a much inferior performance, which reads oddly like an imitation, not of himself, but of some of his own imitators, who by this time were numerous.

Mr. Stevenson presents for us, in a new and extremely interesting form, the problem whether it would not have been better for him to have been born in a period not "literary" at all. In such a case he might have written nothing; but in such a case, had he written anything, his native fund of humour and of imagination, his hardly surpassed faculty of telling a story (though not exactly of finishing one), his wit, his command at once of the pathetic and the horrible, must have found organs of expression which would not have been choked and chained and distorted as they were by the effort to imitate—to make a style eclectic yet original. But we may very well be thankful for him as he was, and hope that the first great novelist of the coming century will be half as good as he, the last exclusively of the nineteenth.[1]

[1] Although she just reached the twentieth, at least a note must be given to Charlotte Mary Yonge (1823-1901), one of the most prolific, one of the most stainless morally, and one of not the least gifted by natural wit and acquired accomplishment, of all English novelists.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY AND CRITICISM

Carlyle—His life and works—His genius—His style—Kinglake—Buckle—Freeman—Green—Froude—Matthew Arnold—Mr. Ruskin—Art in English literature—Symonds—Pater.

THERE is a certain advantage in taking the prominent departments of prose, in any given period, together; that the prominent departments, apart from fiction, of English prose, during the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century, have been history and criticism, there will be little question; and, moreover, the two are connected by more than this chance link. As a matter of fact nearly all permanent historians of the time, Macaulay, Carlyle, Froude, have been critics, even literary critics, while Mr. Ruskin, the most prominent critic, pure and simple, has paid constant, if sometimes fantastic, attention to history. Sometimes, indeed, we may meet with a historian like Mr. Freeman, whose taste is not mainly for literature, or with a critic like Mr. Arnold, who has a positive distaste for history. But these are exceptions which make, not unmake, the rule. As stated before, this chapter will be headed by Carlyle, who, though an older man than almost any mentioned in this Book, hardly made any definite mark till the thirties, and maintained his primacy during no less than forty-four years of the reign of Queen Victoria.

Thomas Carlyle was born on 4th December 1795, at Ecclefechan in Dumfriesshire. He was the son of a stone-mason, and both his father and his mother were persons of strong character, not a few of their famous son's phrases and ways of speech being, it would seem, traceable to them. The parish school, the Academy or Grammar School of Annan, and the University of Edinburgh, which he entered in his fifteenth year, saw his education; and then, having no fancy for the Church, and less for the Law, he became a schoolmaster, and practised that office, against the grain, for some years in different places. He did some hackwork for encyclopædias, etc., and wrote a little for the *London Magazine*, as he

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did later for *Fraser* and the *Edinburgh*. *Blackwood*, a more congenial place than any of these, he seems never to have tried, and its Toryism would probably then have repelled him. He lived for a time in London, knew Coleridge, wrote (in the orthodox late Georgian style, as different from his later and characteristic way as a wax candle from a Roman one) his respectable *Life of Schiller* (1825), and in 1826 secured his future career by marrying Miss Jane Welsh, a young lady much his superior in position, possessed of a small property, attractive, though no beauty, in person, and albeit provided, as became a descendant of John Knox, with a quick temper and an exceedingly sharp tongue, yet also endowed with something like genius, with extraordinary resolution and devotion, and with the practical wits necessary to nurse or mother (for it very nearly came to that) a dyspeptic, desponding, and extremely unpractical man of genius himself. The small, and probably not very exceptional, unhappinesses of the pair have been unfairly made known, and unduly exaggerated by comment. But it is not very certain that Mrs. Carlyle would have been happier with any one else, certain that she received, as none of her contemporaries except Mrs. Tennyson did, the position of "wife to a man of genius," which she coveted, and certain also that this genius would very likely have come to little or nothing but for her. Carlyle retired to his wife's farm of Craigenputtock, in his native county; and between 1828 and 1834, at Craigenputtock, he digested (in so far as he ever did digest) the chaos of thought and doubt that had been seething in him for a third of a century, acquired his own style, and applied it in *Sartor Resartus*, *The French Revolution* (at least most of it), and by far the greater part of the articles and reviews which compose his *Miscellaneous Essays*.

The first of these—one of the wildest books in appearance (so much so that it disgusted and frightened most of the subscribers to *Fraser's*, in which it appeared), but original and memorable as few are—contains, in the guise of an account of the German philosopher, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, and his "philosophy of clothes" (a notion borrowed from Swift, as much of the nomenclature is translated from Scott), a good deal of autobiography. Entepfuhl is Ecclefechan, and the spot of the revelation of the "Everlasting No," nominally the Rue St. Thomas de l'Enfer in Paris, has been authoritatively identified with the junction of Leith Walk and Pilrig Street, on the outskirts of Edinburgh. But it also contained the first and almost the definitive manifesto of Carlyle's celebrated "Gospel"—a gospel very negative in general and not in detail very positive, but wholly tonic and healthy in its denunciation of the shams which at no time in the world's history have been more prominent than in the nineteenth century.

In 1834 the Carlyles moved to London, and soon established themselves in the Chelsea house which continued to be their home. *The French Revolution*, after being destroyed by accident and rewritten, appeared in 1837, and there could be no doubt about Carlyle after this. No such combination of historical research and vivid dramatic quality had been seen before. It stands, and ever will stand, alone—at once a history of remarkable accuracy (the errors detected since are all trifles) and a romance of hardly equalled splendour. Carlyle lectured a good deal in his early London years, but only one course was published by himself, the *Heroes and Hero-Worship* of 1841. Between this and *The French Revolution* he had issued the short piece on *Chartism* (not his happiest); and with the *Heroes*, or nearly so, appeared the first collection of his admirable *Essays*. His peculiar historical method reappeared in *Past and Present* (1843), the earlier part of which is an astonishing imaginative, yet not fabulous, reconstruction of the Middle Ages; and then he set it to a new and severe task in *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (1845). These latter documents, many of which are written in the most obscure jargon that ever called itself English, are by Carlyle not merely woven up, after the fashion which Boswell had begun and Lockhart perfected, into a continuous biography, but interpreted with altogether marvellous patience, ingenuity, and devotion. He did not publish anything more till 1850, when the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*—things more like the *Sartor* in style than anything he had written in the interval, and among the greatest of political satires—appeared, while he followed them up next year with the quietest, and in the common sense most human, of all his books, the *Life* of his friend *John Sterling*. And then he grappled with the *History of Frederick the Great*, which practically exhausted even his energies for fourteen years. The result was a book as to which some extreme Carlylians are in doubt whether to wish or not that he had never written it. The hero is quite unworthy of him, the scale and scheme could not be made other than scrappy, and few of the incidents and characters are of the very first interest. Yet out of the vast miscellany, for that is what it really is, almost innumerable things of the first excellence may be picked. It was finished in 1865. Carlyle was soon after elected Rector by the students of his old University, and, again a little later, his wife died. He passed the remaining years of his life, which ended in 1881, in arranging his own and his wife's memoirs, publishing only a few things—*Early Kings of Norway* (1875) the best. His autobiographical remains were published after his death by Mr. Froude—in undoubted good faith, and not to the direct annoyance of any reasonable disciple, but with the certain effect

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of for a time alienating the foolisher folk by their nature, and with the too probable one of deterring posterity by their bulk. Some day, no doubt, a Carlyle will arise for Carlyle himself, and do for him what he did for Cromwell if not for Frederick.

His genius.

About his genius there can be no doubt from the true comparative and historical view, whatever temporary disturbances and displacements of opinion may have been or may be. It has three aspects—the first, which concerns us least, that of general tone; the next, which concerns us more, that of handling and treatment of subject; and the last, which concerns us most, that of style. It is because of his peculiar handling and treatment that Carlyle almost alone, of persons born before the end of the eighteenth century, has been included in this Book. Whether the nineteenth has developed remarkable types of its own, in life and character, may be a question not for some time to be confidently answered in the negative or in the affirmative; that it has endeavoured to enter, and to a great extent has succeeded in entering, as no other has done, into types and characters of the past, is certain. And in this respect no writer has expressed its tendencies more powerfully than Carlyle. He may almost be said to have been the first to present historic characters "realised" after the fashion of the novelist, but with limitation to fact. In other words, he wrote history as Shakespeare long before and Scott in his own time wrote drama or romance, though he tasked his imagination not to create but to vivify and rearrange the particulars.

His style.

The style which he used for this purpose, and which undoubtedly had not a little to do with the success of the method, could hardly have come into existence except at the time of the revolt of prose, following that of poetry, against the limitations and conventions of the eighteenth century. Representing, as it did, that revolt pushed to its very furthest, it naturally shocked precisians, some of whom are not reconciled to this day; and it must be admitted that it was susceptible of degradation and mannerism even in its creator's hands, and has proved, almost without exception, a detestable thing in those of imitators. But Carlyle himself at his best, and sometimes to his last, could use it with such effect of pathos now and then, of magnificence often, of vivid and arresting presentation in all but a few cases, as hardly any prose-writer has ever excelled. His expression, like the matter conveyed in it, may be too strong for the weak, too varied and elusory in its far-ranging purport for the dull, too much penetrated with ethical gravity and clear-eyed recognition of fact for those who like mere prettiness and mere æsthetic make-believe; but both are of the rarest and greatest.

Its characteristics, like those of nearly all great styles, are partly

obvious, partly recondite, or altogether fugitive, even from the most acute and persevering investigation. In the lowest place come the mechanical devices of capitals—a revival, of course, of an old habit —italics, dashes, and other recourses to the assistance of the printer. Next may be ranked certain stenographic tricks as regards grammar —the omission of conjunctions, pronouns, and generally all parts of speech which, by relying strictly on the reader's ability to perceive the meaning without them, can be omitted, and the omission of which both gives point and freshness to the whole and emphasises those words that are left. Next and higher come exotic, and specially German, constructions, long compound adjectives, unusual comparatives and superlatives like "beautifuller," unsparing employment of that specially English idiom by which, as it has been hyperbolically said, every verb can be made a noun and every noun a verb, together with a certain, though not very large, admixture of actual neologisms and coinings like "Gigmanity." Farther still from the mechanical is the art of arrangement in order of words and juxtaposition of clauses, cadence and rhythm of phrase, all of which go so far to make up style in the positive. And beyond these again comes the indefinable part, the part which always remains and defies analysis.

The origin of the whole has been much discussed. It is certain that in his first published book there is, as has been said, no trace of it. The *Life of Schiller* is not very distinguishable from the more solemn efforts of Lockhart or Southey; while in *Sartor Resartus*, written but a short time afterwards, the style is full-blown and in its very wildest luxuriance. It used to be put down almost wholly to imitation of the Germans, especially Richter; but though some influence from Jean Paul is not to be denied, it may be very easily exaggerated. Undoubtedly there are some reminiscences of Sterne, Jean Paul's master. Carlyle is said himself to have attributed much of it to family slang caught from his father and mother, and it is certain that there are strong resemblances in it to Scottish writing of the seventeenth century of the more fantastic kind, such as that of Sir Thomas Urquhart. But we find premonitions of Carlyle in many places, even such unexpected ones as Johnson, and on the whole the manner may be most safely and accurately described as in the smaller part a mosaic from his immense reading, in the larger part due partly to the creative, but more to the arranging and transforming, power of his own genius.

The historical production of the latter half or two-thirds of the century has been very considerable, but there are perhaps not more than four or five other writers who can secure a place here, while even in the case of one or two of these objections might be raised.

Alexander Kinglake, not exactly a great historian, and a con-

spicuous victim of the temporary craze for devoting histories of enormous length to periods of short duration, occupies a very important place in the history of English style. He was born in 1811, was educated at Eton and Cambridge, and, being a man of easy means, spent the rest of his life partly as a member of Parliament, partly in travel abroad, and partly in London club-life at home, till his death in 1891. He set a certain note of style, with more distinctness and effect than has been always recognised, in the brilliant volume of travel called *Eothen*, which appeared in 1844. Of the brilliancy, and to a great extent the novelty, of the style of this there can be no question. But of its positive goodness there may be much. The hard brassy flash of almost swaggering epigram, which Matthew Arnold later denounced in the *History of the Crimean War*, is already apparent, and is partly induced by the author's affectation of a sort of "thorn-crackling" *persiflage* over things in general, animated by a superficial and deliberate cynicism. Nor are the contrasted passages of fine writing more agreeable, being even more than Bulwer's (which they partly follow) gaudy and insincere, while in both keys there is a determination to write unlike other people, to be clever at all costs, to unite surprising epithets with unexpected nouns. The general effect is certainly "Corinthian"; but the length of the book is not sufficient to make it positively disagreeable, and Kinglake's influence, direct and transmitted, has been enormous. It was perhaps unfortunate for him that he ever undertook his vast *History of the Crimean War* (1863-87). He had many things in his favour—personal knowledge of part of the matter, almost unlimited access to documents, vivid interest, and, as *Eothen* had shown, a pen which, to whatever dangers it was exposed, had almost superabundant energy, facility, and resource. But all the faults of his style and attitude (except that he exchanged that of a cynical *flaneur* for that of a prose epic-maker) reappeared in exaggerated form, and were aggravated further by two fatal faults of handling. In the first place, going beyond even his models Thiers and Macaulay, he magnified the scale of his book to a quite intolerable extent; and, in the second, he allowed personal passion and animus to transform parts of it into laboured panegyric, and other parts into virulent lampoon. In short, great as are the powers which the book displays, it must be called, on the whole, an imposing failure.

Kinglake.

Another, though a very different, instance of the influence of the idols of the middle of the century is to be found in Henry Thomas Buckle, who was born in 1823 (or 1821?), was privately educated, followed no profession, and died young at Damascus in 1862. Apart from some unnoteworthy *Miscellanies*, his work is contained in his unfinished *History of Civilisation in Europe*,

Buckle.

of which two volumes (1857-61) only appeared. Buckle, who was a kind of disciple of French Positivism, emulated French writers even more in the audacious and fallacious sweep of his generalisations, attributing effects in bulk to the simple operation of certain physical causes, forcing facts to agree with his theories wherever an agreement, even in appearance, was possible, and unceremoniously neglecting them where it was not. His style is neither picturesque nor elaborate, but very clear and forcible, admitting no doubt about his meaning, and at the same time putting that meaning with a vigour which the extremely clear styles very often lack. He had no taste, not much judgment, a great deal of prejudice, and was almost entirely dominated by the unintelligent iconoclasm and anti-supernaturalism of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth century. But his faults (except a certain violence) were not English, and he had merits which also are not the commonest in English writers, so that he may be treated by orthodox critics with more charity than he showed in his own unorthodox criticism.

Freeman.

Edward Augustus Freeman (1823-92) and John Richard Green (1837-83) stood to each other in the relation of master and pupil, while both, though they devoted their chief energies to a period which Macaulay despised, owed him a good deal—Green a very great deal—in method and style. Mr. Freeman, who as a boy was privately educated, but went to Oxford and became a Fellow of Trinity College, first distinguished himself by work on church architecture; but this was in his case chiefly a means to the study of History, and he soon concentrated himself upon that of England before, during, and for a century or so after the period of the Norman Conquest. His *History* of that event, the publication of which occupied the decade between 1867 and 1876, was not only the most thorough examination of the subject ever made up to its own time, but, whatever minor alterations or supplements it may require, is not likely to lose the position of classical work on that subject. Also Freeman, whose time was his own, and who was a very facile writer, produced largely in book form, and in contributions to newspapers (only a small part of which was ever collected), on the subjects of history, historical geography, historical politics, and architecture. He was a very learned, and generally, if not invariably, a very accurate writer; and the value of his writings for reference and as materials is not easily to be exaggerated. Unfortunately, he was both prolix and pedantic in his general handling, was extremely violent and unfair in the controversies in which he delighted, and, besides other defects of style, had almost from the first an irritating habit of allusive periphrasis partly caught from Gibbon, but used without any of Gibbon's matchless judgment.

He was, however, hardly to be called a picturesque historian by direct intention; his pupil, John Richard Green, was this first of all. He was a native of Oxford, and educated first at Magdalen College School, and then at Jesus College. He took orders, contributed a good deal to the *Saturday Review*, and did a certain amount of parochial work in London. His *Short History of the English People* appeared in 1874, and became more popular than any other historical work of the century except Macaulay's. This book he afterwards expanded somewhat, and supported with a series of monographs, which was probably only prevented by his early death from forming a valuable historical library. But his fame will rest on the *Short History*, which has, if not a few of the defects, all the merits of its popularity. As in Macaulay's case, the accuracy of fact is usually scrupulous, but, also as in Macaulay's case (and even to a greater extent, inasmuch as Mr. Green took further liberties of picturesque style), the facts are generalised, grouped, and rhetorically presented in a way not perhaps invariably tending so much to exact apprehension of the fact as to striking exhibition of it.

Green.

An almost infinitely greater writer than either of these (who were his inveterate and hostile critics), not perhaps in reality much more of a partisan advocate than either, but unfortunately the inferior of both, to an altogether surprising degree, in accuracy of statement, was James Anthony Froude. He was born near Totnes in 1818, and died near Salcombe, in the same county, in 1894. He was the younger brother of Richard Hurrell Froude, Newman's companion in the Oxford Movement, and was, after his brother's death, himself for a time much under Newman's influence. But the catastrophe of the movement sent him not to Rome but to freethought; he resigned his Fellowship and began to write for a living. He had already published two books, *Shadows of the Clouds* (1847) and the *Nemesis of Faith* (1849). His magazine and review contributions included the admirable Essays, afterwards collected as *Short Studies* (1867-83). But he had more ambitious designs, and being, like most of his contemporaries, bitten with the mania for history on an enormous scale, began a great *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Armada*, which appeared in twelve volumes between 1856 and 1869, and, though attacked with almost frantic bitterness by Freeman and his disciples, made a great reputation. This was deserved, despite the faults of inaccuracy, of paradox, and of partisanship, which are undeniable, because of the merit—at times the transcendent merit—of the style, the novel and intense kind of patriotism, and above all, the wonderful gift of historic realisation which it displays. This last gift Mr. Froude perhaps got from his following of Carlyle, and he

Froude.

possessed it as no other historian of our time except Carlyle has had it.

For a time Mr. Froude edited *Fraser's Magazine*, and when his great book was done he undertook another, extensive but not so extensive, *The English in Ireland*, which appeared in three volumes between 1871 and 1874. In this latter year, and again in the following, he was sent on a Government mission to the Cape, and he extended his journeys to other English colonies, with book results —*Oceana* (1886), *The Bow of Ulysses* (The English in the West Indies) (1888). In 1889 he published an Irish historical novel, *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*. At the death of his enemy Freeman, he succeeded him as Professor of Modern History at Oxford, and died holding the post, his lectures in which had given birth to his two last books—*Erasmus* (1894) and *English Seamen* (1895). Even in this list not a few books have been omitted, such as his admirable *Bunyan* (1880) and the less good *Caesar* (1879). His discharge of his duties as Carlyle's literary executor from 1881 onward had brought on him much obloquy, and even some accusations of treachery to his friend and master; but these latter were absurd, and it probably is for posterity to judge whether the apparently ruthless publication of private matter was judicious or not. It is indeed probable that in his own ironic and rather cynical mood,[1] which had been brought about in his case, as in some others, by the shock of religious loss, Mr. Froude did not fully anticipate the effect which the disclosures would have on an age as sentimental in reality as it is pessimist in affectation. This temper of his, which is well vouched for, and which escapes in a tell-tale manner now and then at corners of his books, by no means colours them as a whole, being for the most part subordinated to the intense enthusiasm for heroic conduct of all kinds which he had learnt from Carlyle himself, and which was of the utmost service to him as a historian. In the long run, however, he is certain to survive chiefly by virtue of his marvellous style, the greatest simple style among English writers of the latter half of the century, unless that position be accorded equally—it cannot be awarded alone—to his other master, and in a spiritual sense "lost leader," Newman.

Mr. Froude's chief Oxford contemporaries, Arnold and Ruskin, were not historians, but the transition from historian to critic, and especially from this historian to these critics, is smooth and natural enough. Not only did all "feed their flocks upon the self-same hill," and in very nearly the self-same years, but all in different ways

[1] The best, or at least the pleasantest, expression of this is the quite charming *Cat's Pilgrimage*, which appeared originally in the *Leader* (1851), and was afterwards incorporated with the *Short Studies*.

were products of that incalculable ocean-wave of English thought, not even yet half enough allowed for, called The Oxford Movement; and it was merely an accident of individual temperament which led one to history, another to literature, and the third to art, as their special provinces—provinces from which, however, each diverged not a little widely, and in the cases of Arnold and Ruskin not a little disastrously. In all, too, whether nominally historians or not, reigned the dominant historical spirit of the nineteenth century—the unconquerable desire, even in those who think themselves most busy with the present, to know first of all what the past has said and thought and done, if only under the pretext of applying the discovery to their own times.

The chief dates and events of Matthew Arnold's life will be given below in connection with his poetry. He was not very early known to the public as a critic or as a prose-writer on other than official subjects, though the *Preface* of 1853 revealed him in both these characters to those who could read. By degrees his contributions to magazines, and his growing reputation at Oxford, widened the circle of those who could appreciate him, and the main doctrines of his *Essays in Criticism* (1865)—the good influence of Academies, the "Philistine" tendencies of English thought and style, the necessity of adhering to the ancients and the grand manner, the deficiency of his countrymen in ideas, and the like—may be seen to some small extent in the writings of those who had read him before the publication of the book. That publication, however, established his position—a position which he held, and to some extent enlarged, during the next twenty years. He was, moreover, Professor of Poetry at Oxford between 1857 and 1867, and his lectures took book form, principally in two very interesting works of criticism, *On Translating Homer* (1861) and *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). It cannot be said that at any time he was popular, or that any of his writings had a very wide sale. But, speaking as he did from the very first as one who had no doubt of his own authority, that authority was gradually accepted—never, indeed, without dissents—in his proper province of literature. Unfortunately, he was tempted, according to his own revival of the Greek doctrine of the philosophic position—which he practically identified for modern times with that of "culture" or literature—to stray from this proper domain into others. The quaint and long unreprinted *Friendship's Garland* (1871), in which, on the text of the Franco-Prussian War, he took occasion to reproach his countrymen with their inferiority to Germany in politics and practice generally (just as he had reproached them with their inferiority to France in Ideas, Sweetness, Light, and so forth), redeemed, indeed,

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an excessive affectation of tone and style, and some rather ephemeral jocularity, by great liveliness of rather mannered satire, and by a considerable undercurrent of truth. But a series of works, mainly on theological subjects—*Culture and Anarchy* (1869), *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), *God and the Bible* (1875)—occupied too much of his time and was not fortunate. The air of jaunty infallibility, which had sometimes jarred even in matters where the speaker's competence could not be denied, and which, after all, were matters of taste or nothing, sat but ill on one speaking as an amateur on the gravest subjects.

Fortunately, Mr. Arnold returned before his death to his proper sphere, and, in ways not always free from the defects acquired in this theological escapade, added not inconsiderably to his total stock in his real business. *Mixed Essays* (1879) and *Essays in Criticism* (second series, 1888) contained much admirable work; *Irish Essays* (1882) and *Discourses in America* (1885) contained some. This business was in effect the inculcation—by dint of exhortation in a very peculiar, slightly wearisome, and often very faultily-mannered, but at its best incomparably dainty, elegant, and fascinating style—of a literary attitude which had perhaps always been too rare in England, and which, during the Romantic revolt, as well as during the Classical domination, had been almost unknown. This was what may be called the comparative attitude in literary criticism, the comparison taking in not merely the ancients but moderns of all times. By virtue of one of his characteristic crotchets, Mr. Arnold declined to infuse this comparison with the full historical sense which it, in fact, requires, and of which it is in reality the child. He erected certain standards and barriers, sometimes just enough, sometimes quite arbitrary, which he called "the grand style," "high seriousness," and so forth. We were to admire the Greeks and in a less degree the Latins; but we were not to admire, save very moderately, the men of the Middle Age other than Dante. The French were held up as models in some ways; but Mr. Arnold could not honestly recommend French poetry. Shakespeare had the grand style only by accident. Chaucer had not high seriousness. In short, no criticism, judged by individual utterances, is much more piecemeal, arbitrary, fantastic, and unsane than Mr. Arnold's own, austere demander though he be of order, law, and sanity in literature. Nevertheless, the general effect of this criticism was wholly useful and good; and if it be somewhat unhistorical to say that it changed critical habits in England for the better, it is not in the least unhistorical to say that it was the first important symptom of such a change. The criticism of the Romantic school had been great, but by force of genius rather than learning, and it had, even in the hands of such men as De

Quincey, much more of Hazlitt and Lamb, been far too insular. The criticism of the second generation had not been great at all, or where it had possessed greatness, as in the cases of Macaulay and Carlyle, had not been strictly literary. Even French criticism (to which Mr. Arnold resorted for help, especially from Sainte-Beuve) was in his own time changing for the worse, and becoming, in the hands of Taine and his followers, a barren branch of pseudo-science, busying itself with question-begging and otiose problems of race, tendencies, and the like, instead of attending to the pure art of literary comparison. Accordingly his theory, if not his practice, especially at a time when study of the classics was being ousted from the place which it had so long rightfully held, was valuable. And though the style in which it was expressed was by no means faultless, yet it could not but gain from that style — one of almost impeccable correctness in formal points, glittering but not gaudy at its best, possessing the indescribable rhythm, which is never metre, of the best prose, pure without being pedantic in vocabulary, and at least sometimes attaining the very and mere salt of classical elegance.

The other writer who has been specially mentioned (one who took his place here of right while still living) exhibits most excellent differences. Mr. John Ruskin was born in London on 8th February 1819, and educated at home chiefly, his father, who was a wine-merchant and a man of means, having a house at Denmark Hill. He went to Oxford as a gentleman-commoner of Christ Church, gained the Newdigate for a poem on *Salsette and Elephanta* in 1839, and took his degree in 1842, being thus entitled to describe himself in his first work, *Modern Painters*, which followed next year, as "a graduate of Oxford." Mr. Ruskin was an ardent student of art, in which, as far as drawing, if not painting, went, he attained considerable proficiency; but his real weapon was the pen, not the pencil. His first purpose in using it was the extolling of Turner above all painters of his own day and most of days past; but the book, which extended to five large volumes and occupied seventeen years in composition and publication, turned to a vast assemblage of what the Middle Ages would have called "quodlibetal questions"—discussions on all matters connected, and some hardly connected at all, with art. Nor did the author confine himself to this ample channel for discharging his opinions and employing his unique style. A much shorter treatise, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, appeared in 1849, and *The Stones of Venice*, in scale and character almost as ambitious as *Modern Painters* itself, in 1851-53; while between 1855 and 1859 Mr. Ruskin took up, as he had done earlier, the cudgels for the English Pre-Raphaelite school in a series of "Academy Notes." He issued two sets of *Lectures on Architecture*

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and Painting (1854), and began to diverge into somewhat alien paths with *The Political Economy of Art* (1857). He had also written, with other things, *Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds* (1851), the title showing an ingenious perversity which gained on him; a fairy story, *The King of the Golden River*, in 1854, etc.

In the succeeding decade or so he wrote no large books, but a crowd of small ones, most of them titled in the fashion above noted—*The Ethics of the Dust* and *The Crown of Wild Olive*, 1866; *Sesame and Lilies*, 1865; *The Queen of the Air*, 1869; *Unto this Last*, 1862; *Time and Tide by Wear and Tyne*, 1867—in which he applied his peculiar method, always intertwisting a strand of reference to morals and another to art, to almost every conceivable subject—literature, political economy, mythology, and physical science, in fact, the whole encyclopædia, with the contents of any daily newspaper thrown in. Yet another decade saw him Slade Professor of Fine Art at his own University (1869-79), and witnessed the addition to his miscellanies of *Munera Pulveris*, 1862-63; *Aratra Pentelici*, 1872; *The Eagle's Nest*, 1872; *Love's Meinie*, 1873; *Ariadne Florentina*, 1876; *The Laws of Fésole*, 1877-79, etc.; while between 1871 and 1884 he issued what can perhaps best be called an autobiographic chronicle, with digressions, entitled *Fors Clavigera*. He established himself after a time at Brantwood, on Coniston Lake, and in his last few years no new publications were issued by him, though new editions, and more than one or two recastings of the mighty *Modern Painters*, his *magnum opus*, have to be added to the list already given, which is itself not nearly complete. He died in 1900.

An influence of such volume, of such peculiarity, and directing itself in so many ways, could not but have great and manifold results; and it is not entirely easy to separate those which directly concern literature from those which indirectly concern it. Mr. Ruskin had written a great deal on literature itself, and had said many very true and beautiful things, but also not a few rather false and silly ones. But he is most important for us, first and chiefly because of the unique character of his style, and secondly because of the way in which he not only once for all gave the subject of art a firm hold upon English literary treatment, but affected literature itself most powerfully by influences drawn from painting and sculpture.

Up to the time of the appearance of *Modern Painters*, the arts of design had had but little literary treatment in England, and had exercised still less influence upon literature itself. Towards the end of the seventeenth century Evelyn, Pepys, and Roger North had shown an intelligent connoisseurship, and Dryden had written a remarkable, if rather "outside," essay on the parallel of Poetry and Painting. Horace Walpole had

Art in English literature.

had for the subject not the least sincere of his many fancies, and Sir Joshua Reynolds's very remarkable *Discourses* had bestowed on it formal state and rank. The two greatest of the Romantic critics proper, Lamb and Hazlitt, had had a great love for, and the latter a considerable knowledge of, it; while Hartley Coleridge, if not his father, had the same bent. But despite all this, and despite the further fact that it had been the fashion, ever since Charles I. set it, for men of rank and wealth to import objects and make collections, the subject had taken no real hold of literature; and the general attitude of men of letters to artists was, if not one of positively sneering superiority, yet one of patronising condescension. The position, the genius, and the intimate connection with letters and men of letters of Reynolds himself, with the establishment of the Royal Academy, and the favour (if not a very discriminating favour) shown by George III. to art, began to alter this; the half-misunderstood "Picturesque" of Gilpin and his followers helped the alteration; and when, after the cessation of the Napoleonic wars, the English began to return to the Continent and investigate its treasures in a less conventional fashion than that of the old "grand tour," a much greater impetus was given to art-study. This also helped, and was helped by, the determination of the poetry of the younger Romantics—Shelley, Keats, and most of all Tennyson—to the visual effect. When Mr. Ruskin was a mere boy, the marvellous gallery of landscapes and figure-pieces in Tennyson's *Palace of Art* and *Dream of Fair Women* had definitely "placed" the new method in poetry; while Landor, De Quincey, and, in his splashy and uncertain way, Wilson, with such minor and very different figures as Wainewright and Darley, had even earlier done the same for prose. But Mr. Ruskin gave the method an extension which could hardly have been dreamed of by readers of the men just mentioned. In his three great early books almost every aspect of natural scenery, almost every masterpiece of pictorial and architectural art, in Europe was described with a fervour, with a minuteness, with a poetic convincingness of imagination, and above all, in a style, which had never been known before. From that time the blending of the two arts, as far as literature was concerned, and the place of the younger sister or sisters in literary treatment, was assured.

The most important agent in this, of course, was the style. Here, as so often in very great style, there is no single or obvious trick—no Lylyan antithesis and simile, no Johnsonian parallelism and balance, to put the finger on. Rhythm, as in all the great prose artists, is, of course, Mr. Ruskin's principal weapon; and it is of a piece with the wilful lawlessness and want of self-criticism which distinguish all his work that he too often transgresses the boundary between

rhythm and metre. The imbedded blank verse is altogether too frequent in his prose. But the fault is rendered less apparent by the extreme length of his sentences. He is the first writer since the seventeenth century who has dared, not once or twice in a way—Burke did that—but constantly, to indulge in sentences of twenty or thirty lines, nay, of more than a whole page, in length; and while the metrical passages act to some extent as buoys and corks to keep this length floating, they are also to some extent lost in it, and do not offend the ear as they would in smaller units. This extreme length is also partially justified by the fact that Mr. Ruskin, even when nominally arguing, is for the most part building up pictures for the eye by successive strokes, and that that faithful organ retains the earlier and accepts the later touches with docility. It is also to be said as one of his highest commendations that, magnificent and varicoloured as is the effect, he is by no means a "fine writer" in the ordinary sense. He does not affect unusual words; he is by no means prodigal of adjectives, unless they are, strictly speaking, wanted; and, above all, he is entirely free from the besetting fault of the generation which has succeeded him—the quest for unusual and surprising conjunctions of phrase. That he learnt a good deal from Carlyle is not disputable; but he used what he learnt in quite different material, and with a totally different literary, though not a very different moral, effect.

Symonds.

Although, as usually (and negligibly) happens, Mr. Ruskin's ideas, when their first stage of unacceptance and their second of acceptance were over, came to be cavilled at and pooh-poohed, nearly all writers since have in some ways been affected by them. The two most noteworthy of these were Mr. Symonds and Mr. Pater. John Addington Symonds was born in Bristol in 1840. He was the son of a local physician of very high repute, was educated at Harrow, whence he passed to Oxford (Balliol), and as a Fellow to Magdalen. He succeeded rather early to more than a competence, and, suffering from consumptive tendencies, spent most of his later years at Davos in the Engadine. He died at Rome in 1893. He wrote both in verse and in prose, but in verse produced nothing of real importance. Even in prose his work was marred not merely by an extremely flowery style, which did not attain to the higher characteristics of Mr. Ruskin's, but by a flux of verbose prolixity with which, copious as has been the production of the author of *Modern Painters*, no one could charge him. Even Symonds's chief and really important book, the *History of the Renaissance in Italy* (1875-86), would bear much compression, and almost every one of his numerous volumes of essays imperatively calls for it.

This could not justly be said of Walter Horatio Pater, who was

born in London in 1839, was educated at the King's School, Canterbury, and passing to Oxford, became in due time a Fellow of Brasenose, which position he held for the rest of his life, though latterly he lived a good deal in London. He printed nothing except contributions to magazines till he was nearly thirty-five, and his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, which appeared in 1873, was a very carefully selected, and still more carefully revised, body of essays, scarcely exceeding two hundred pages in length. It displayed a most elaborate and novel style, and in its few words conveyed something like a complete life-philosophy, inculcating the cultivation of, and carefully-measured indulgence in, æsthetic pleasures, as practically the one thing to be heeded. But the book rather attracted the attention (and not always the admiration) of the few than the worship of the many, and Mr. Pater published no other for all but ten years. Afterwards he was a little more prolific, and some posthumous publications (he died in 1894), not always adjusted for press with his own anxious care, have appeared. His manner and matter are best seen in the *Studies*, afterwards reissued, with some slight alterations; in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), a longish novel, not at all of action, of the second century; and in the volume of essays called *Appreciations*, which opens with a deliberate essay on "Style."[1] Pater.

On this last point Mr. Pater's theory and practice coincided with, but were hardly derived from, those of the great French novelist Flaubert, whose doctrine of the "single word," or unique phrase which alone will express the author's meaning, he almost fully accepted, though he saw some of its dangers and (in fact) absurdities. His own practice included the careful building up of clause, sentence, and paragraph, the constituents and the total being equally regarded; a cunning scheme of rhythm, which never transgresses the bounds of metre; and an almost excessively sifted vocabulary, in which epithet and noun are chosen with attention to a certain effect of strangeness —a slight shock of not unpleasurable surprise. This is an old trick, to which, from its earliest important practitioner in their language, the French had applied the term *Marivaudage*. Its general effect in Mr. Pater's own best passages is one of extreme beauty; indeed, these passages rank with the choicest in English. But not very seldom in himself, and very frequently indeed in his imitators, there resulted a new Euphuism which is rather disastrous.

[1] Mr. Pater's other works in his lifetime were *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), a book of remarkable imagination, more nearly approaching the creative than most of his work, but unequally written; and *Plato and Platonism* (1893).

CHAPTER IV

POETRY SINCE THE MIDDLE OF THE CENTURY

Matthew Arnold—The "Spasmodics"—Clough—Locker—The Earl of Lytton—The Pre-Raphaelites—Their preparation—Dante and Christina Rossetti—William Morris—O'Shaughnessy—Others.

THERE can be little hesitation in dating a change in attitude towards poetry from about the middle of the nineteenth century, when the powers of Tennyson and of Browning, if not universally recognised, were still thoroughly manifested. This change, which has resulted in verse, sometimes not far, if at all, below the level of the best of the first and second Romantic periods, exhibits, except in the single instance of Mr. Swinburne, a somewhat greater resort to extrinsic sources of interest—a kind of relapse upon the classics in Matthew Arnold, a double dose of Mediævalism and Early Renaissance touches in the Pre-Raphaelites, and later still sporadic and spasmodic excursions or returns to science, to Wordsworthian gravity of expression, to this or that reinforcement or crutch. In other words, there is a slight want of confident originality and independence.

The most interesting names, or groups of names, here, are those of Mr. Arnold by himself, of the abortive "Spasmodic School" a little later, and of the by no means abortive Pre-Raphaelite group later still; while, though many of the later-born individuals, including the great poet referred to in the last paragraph, are alive, and so excluded from treatment, the "abhorred shears" have already given us but too many subjects.

Matthew Arnold.

Matthew Arnold was the eldest son of a man not less well known than himself, and already registered in this book, Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby, and historian of Rome. He was born in 1822, and educated at Winchester, Rugby, and Balliol, from which last college, having previously obtained the Newdigate, he passed to Oriel, where he was elected Fellow in 1845. He did not, however, take college work or remain in Oxford long, but after serving as private secretary to

Lord Lansdowne, married, and accepted an inspectorship of schools in 1850. He had already—with "By A" only on the title-page—published in 1849 *The Strayed Reveller and other Poems*.[1] The same initial appeared on the title-page of *Empedocles on Etna*, 1852. But it was in 1853, when he was just over thirty, that he gave, with his name, the measure at once of his creative and critical powers by a collection of verse, prefaced by an extremely noteworthy discussion of poetry, the first of his attempts at critical disquisition. In this he took, and for the rest of his life never ostensibly abandoned, an attitude towards poetry which was partly a reversion to, and partly an extension of, the Aristotelian theory, making it depend wholly upon the choice, conception, and conduct of the subject. Mr. Arnold did not indeed, like Wordsworth, dismiss metre as merely facultative, but neither did he, on the other hand, like Coleridge, actually, if not explicitly, point out its necessity. And his criticism, like that of every one almost without exception of the same school, is accordingly vitiated by the glaring contradiction, that while as examples of poetry he invariably takes works of metre, there is not, on his principles, any reason why he should not take works in prose.

His poetical practice displays something of the same inconsistency, or at least dichotomy. He is most consistent in employing, or at least endeavouring to employ, a severer kind of diction and versification, drawing itself back from the florid and flowing Tennysonian schemes towards the stiffer movement and graver tones of Wordsworth, Gray, and (in his later years) Milton. He eschews—on principle or from a secret sense of inability to arrange them—the looser lyric measures, and sometimes seems to seek, especially in *The Strayed Reveller*, for a substitute in simple decasyllables, broken up, for no sufficient reason, into fragments. He also attempts, here and elsewhere, unrhymed measures other than ordinary blank verse, and with the usual unsuccess.

But, like his nearest master Wordsworth, he is seldom or never really successful except when he discards, or at any rate conveniently forgets, his theories. It is a little surprising that he did not oftener try the sonnet, which in itself meets his views better than most things, from the happy compromise it affords between importance of matter and beauty of form, and in which he gave one splendid example—that on

[1] Since his death the Newdigate poem on "Cromwell" (as usual, in couplets), and the earlier "Alaric at Rome," a Rugby prize poem in six-lined stanzas written in 1840, have been reissued, with all the poems up to 1853, by Dr. Garnett (London, 1896). As for his later poetical publications, a second series of *Poems* followed in 1855, *Merope* in 1858; then prose absorbed him mainly till the *New Poems* of 1867, and he wrote little verse later, though some fine things.

Shakespeare—and others that are fine. But even here, and still more elsewhere, he is an unequal poet—a poet who frequently breaks down. And in the direct teeth of his theory he is, as much as any poet of the century, a poet of fine things, of passages, of fragments, separable to the greatest advantage from the wholes in which they appear. The splendid blank-verse perorations of "Mycerinus" and "Sohrab and Rustum"; the outburst on "Isolation"—"Yes, in the sea of life enisled"—which, with some other things, redeems the inequality, and in parts the doubtful taste, of "Switzerland"; the beautiful snatch of "Requiescat"; the gorgeous stanzas of "The Scholar Gipsy," "Thyrsis," "Westminster Abbey"; the musical, if ever so little fantastic and insincere, melancholy of "Dover Beach" and "A Summer Night"; and above all, the famous "Forsaken Merman," the one completely successful monument of his combined poetic feeling and art—all these are better on the theories he combated than on the theories he held. In all of them Mr. Arnold was different rather in intention, and in a certain deliberate, but not always maintained, dialect than in real kind, from the seniors or juniors whom he regarded with very lukewarm admiration, and whose way he did not hesitate to pronounce wrong. The elaborate simile at the end of "The Scholar Gipsy"—some twenty lines long—might take place as well in a poem on "Timbuctoo," and could be transferred thence to one on the "Battle of Armageddon." His longer things—*Merope*, a stiff pseudo-Greek play; *Empedocles on Etna*, a chaotic and unequal medley with delightful bursts; *Balder Dead*, a simple-seeming narrative; *Tristram and Iseult*, an unachieved romaunt—besides those named, are always unsuccessful as wholes. But when we remember such bursts (and there are scores of them) as the distich—

> Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
> Still clutching the inviolable shade—

then we know that Mr. Arnold was a poet of the true nineteenth-century fashion, and a great one almost against his will. He has the real throb and cry, the indispensable "moments," the faculty of transforming and transcending; and if these gifts are beset with hesitancy and checked by theoretic rules, this is rather our loss than his disqualification. His criticism, invaluable as an intention and exhortation, will soon be, if it is not already, little more; his poetry is poetry, and therefore immortal.

The "Spasmodics" of the middle of the century—Mr. P. J. Bailey, the long-lived author of *Festus* (1839), Sydney Dobell, Alexander Smith, and perhaps a few others, such as Ernest Jones, the Chartist lawyer—included some men of talent, but they are chiefly

interesting because they show a premature and unsuccessful attempt to do in one direction what Arnold attempted in another—to improve, though in this case rather by advance than by reaction, on the form of Tennyson. Their desire was to be more modern, more "thoughtful," and at the same time slightly more ungirt in form. Sydney Dobell, born at Cranbrook in Kent in 1824, was privately educated, succeeded his father as a wine-merchant at Cheltenham, and was well favoured by circumstance except in the matter of health. He published a closet drama, *The Roman*, in 1850; and another, *Balder*, in 1853; a little later he published poems on, and inspired by, the Crimean War; but nothing further, though he lived for twenty years, dying in 1874. His best and best-known thing is the ballad of "Keith of Ravelston" (not called by that name), where, as sometimes elsewhere, he has touched a string of half-unearthly music, redeeming a total want of self-criticism in his general work, and a tendency to rant and gush and frigid triviality. In fact, to read Dobell as a whole (his works were posthumously published) is a disastrous experiment. Alexander Smith, who, born at Kilmarnock in 1829 or 1830, ended his days as secretary to the University of Edinburgh in 1867, began about the same time as Dobell with a *Life Drama*, also showing a slight tendency to rant, but truer and less unequal as a whole than Dobell's work, though without its occasional "cry." He followed this with *City Poems* (1857) and *Edwin of Deira* (1861), his last consumptive years being chiefly occupied by prose. These men are rather more interesting historically than individually, but they do not lack individual interest.

The "Spasmodics."

Arthur Hugh Clough bears some curious resemblances to Matthew Arnold, whose intimate friend he was, and who celebrated him in a famous following of *Lycidas* and *Adonais*. He was a slightly older man, having been born in 1819, and was educated at Rugby and Balliol, the ferment of the Oxford Movement sending him into freethinking. He resigned, in 1848, a Fellowship to which he had been elected at Oriel, and betook himself first to teaching and then to Government work in the Education Office. He died in 1861. Clough was an odd mixture of Arnold and of the Spasmodics, with a kind of distorted and cankered Tractarian element differentiating him still further. This sort of distraction could find no satisfactory poetic utterance. In his early work, *Ambarvalia* (1849) and the *Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* (1848) (the latter written in bad hexameters), as in the later *Amours de Voyage* and *Dipsychus*, there are good bits, scraps, passages. But he has hardly written a single poem, however short, which can be said to be good as a whole, and perhaps his greatest title to poetic fame is the

Clough.

one exquisite and exquisitely expressed image of the rising tide quoted at the beginning of Book X. p. 653. His "New Decalogue" and one or two other things seem to show that, with more detachment and self-command, he might have done better in satirical than in serious verse.

No doubts choked or chequered, or were, at least in appearance, allowed to appear in, the sunny work of Frederick Locker-Lampson, who was born in 1821 and died in 1895. His books are two only, *London Lyrics* (1857) and *Patchwork* (1879), while *Patchwork* is in part only a commonplace-book of verse and prose. In the original parts of it, and in the verse of *London Lyrics*, Mr. Locker obtained a secure position among the little band—half a dozen strong at most, if so many—of the writers, with capital effect, of verse and prose "of society" in English.

Locker.

Very much more ambitious and prolific was Edward Robert, the first Earl of, and second Lord, Lytton, long known in literature as "Owen Meredith." Born in 1831, and educated at Harrow, but not at Oxford or Cambridge, he entered the diplomatic service at an unusually early age, discharged its duties in various parts of the world, became Viceroy of India in 1876, and died at Paris, where he was Ambassador, in 1891. "Owen Meredith" published, under that name, *Clytemnestra* in 1855, followed it with *The Wanderer* (1859), *Lucile* (1860), *Songs of Servia* (1861), *Orval* (1869), *Chronicles and Characters* (same date), *Fables in Song* (1874), *Glenaveril* (1888), *After Paradise* (1887), while he had earlier collaborated with his friend Julian Fane in a poem on *Tannhäuser;* and after his death two remarkable volumes of posthumous poems, *Marah* and *King Poppy*, appeared. In this large bulk of verse many lyrics of great, though seldom quite unflawed, beauty are contained, the longer poems yield an abundance of interesting and not a few fine passages, and the author constantly displays command of two very excellent gifts—passion and satiric power. He had, however, a pair of drawbacks which sorely mar his work, and have sunk it in general estimation to an unfair degree—the first of them a strange tendency to imitate and echo even when he had ample notes of his own; the second an utter inability to criticise, retrench, and correct. As Tennyson is of all poets that one who has used knife and file with most advantage, so Lord Lytton is he who has rejected their use with worst effect.

The Earl of Lytton.

There can, however, be no comparison in point of historical importance between any of these figures, or the imperfect schools and tendencies which they represent, and the group which arose a little later. In calling this group "Pre-Raphaelite" certain guards and provisos must be appended to the designation. There is no other

term so convenient, or on the whole so appropriate; but the Pre-Raphaelitism of poetry rather overlaps, or coincides with, than directly resembles the Pre-Raphaelitism of art. It is, however, a direct and legitimate development of the great Romantic revival in England. The chief notes of this third stage have been a generally, though not universally, mediæval tone of thought, colour, and in part subject, with, in method, a still further elaboration of the two appeals to imagination—by the way of exact and vivid visual presentation and by that of subtle and varied musical suggestion of sound—which had been so largely carried out by Tennyson, and to some extent originated by Keats. The Pre-Raphaelites.

These had had to educate themselves and their readers. Even Coleridge hesitated about Tennyson's prosody, even Wordsworth was uncertain about his fidelity to nature; while full study of various readings[1] is required to see how much he had to do before he got his own style into perfection. But men who were born about 1830 or later found that style ready to their hand, they found its examples already brought to perfection, they found the public taste, if not fully yet partially, educated to it. Their preparation.

So, too, even Tennyson, much more Scott and Coleridge and their generation, had entered only very partially into the treasures of Mediæval literature, and were hardly at all acquainted with those of Mediæval art. Conybeare, Kemble, Thorpe, Madden were only in Tennyson's own time reviving the study of Old and Middle English. Early French and Early Italian were but just being opened up. Above all, the Oxford Movement directed attention to Mediæval architecture, literature, thought, as had never been the case before in England, and as has never been the case at all in any other country.

The eldest poets of the school were brother and sister, Dante Gabriel and Christina Georgina Rossetti. They belonged to England wholly by birth and education, but only partially by blood. Their father, Gabriel Rossetti, was an Italian refugee, a teacher of his native language, a real though fanciful student of literature, something of a poet himself, and a man of sterling character. He married a Miss Polidori, who was English half by blood and wholly by associations. His eldest son, Gabriel Charles Dante, who rearranged his Christian names for public use, was born in 1828; his second daughter (the eldest, Maria Francesca, was also literary, as was the younger son, still alive, William Michael) in 1830. The life of neither was in the ordinary and outward sense eventful, and it was almost entirely spent in London by both. Dante, who was married to a lady of great beauty, Dante and Christina Rossetti.

[1] Supplied in Mr. Churton Collins's *Early Poems of A. T.* (London, 1900).

Elizabeth Syddall, but lost her soon after marriage, died in 1882. His sister, who was all her life a fervent member of the Church of England, survived him, and died unmarried at the end of 1894.

The main, or at least the professional, occupation of Dante Rossetti's life was not poetry. He was educated at King's College School, but left it early to study drawing, and, young as he was, became one of the most enthusiastic members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was at the middle of the century to convert England from conventional art. His own form of painting was, and remained, the most characteristic of all, never admitting reconciliation with convention, as did that of Millais, and in part of Mr. Holman Hunt, while it possessed far greater charm than that of any other. His drawing was always cavilled at; as to the magnificence of his colour, no one with eyes could doubt. But these characteristics, and others which have the indefinableness of genius, found expression also in another art. Rossetti wrote verse very early ("The Blessed Damozel" itself dates in the first draught from boyhood), but the death of his wife in 1862 postponed for a time the publication of his original work. He had contributed, however, to the Pre-Raphaelite magazines, the *Germ* and the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, and had in 1861 published a volume of translations from early Italian poems, which displays part of the source, and still more of the nature, of his manner. His *Poems* appeared in 1870, with great acceptance from the competent, though with coarse and foolish abuse from others. He issued another volume of *Ballads and Sonnets* the year before his death, and the contents of the two, with alterations and additions, have been collected since.

Although the earlier publication of work by his sister, and by his friends Mr. Morris and Mr. Swinburne, had made the manner of his work familiar to the public before it appeared, there can be little doubt that it was most original in his case. Naturally, he put more of the pictorial element into it than any of the others could do, and, perhaps naturally also, he paid less attention than some of them to the direct aspect of things in nature. No similar professional explanation, however, can be found for the almost equally remarkable mastery of mere resonance, of mere verbal and literal music, which his verse displays; and this must be set down partly to the tendency "in the air," partly to individual gift, and partly to the new instrument afforded by the stately varied harmony of English to a genius prepared ancestrally by the sweet, intense, but slightly monotonous melody of Italian.

Like the work of most of the greater poets of this century, Rossetti's is not very easily or profitably to be classified, save perhaps as regards his very remarkable sonnets, in mastery of which form he

ranks with his sister and Wordsworth. It is possibly unfortunate, though in his case it was more than excusable, that he adopted the Petrarchian form, which is somewhat less suited to the genius of the English language, and not at all better suited to the genius of the sonnet, than the Shakespearian. But his excellence in it, like that of Milton and Wordsworth himself, justifies the indulgence. Of the two great divisions of the sonnet, the meditative and the pictorial, the latter, as we should expect from his double vocation, was his special forte. The "sonnets for pictures" of the first volume have never been excelled, if they have ever been equalled. But he was hardly inferior in the other—the great sonnet-sequence of "The House of Life" coming perhaps next after Shakespeare's as a sequence, while such single examples as "Refusal of Aid between Nations," and the marvellous "Monochord," are supreme.

Another group might be formed of his ballads—longer and almost miniature romances in form, like *Rose Mary*, *The White Ship*, and *The King's Tragedy;* or shorter, like *Troy Town*, *Eden Bower*, and *Sister Helen*. But the really important thing is to recognise in all these forms, from sonnet to ballad-romance, the imposing presence of a joint pictorial and musical appeal different from, and in parts intenser and stranger than, that of any other poet. He could also write things like *The Burden of Nineveh* and *Jenny*, very great poems of a simple cast in language and imagery, direct, with hardly any display of gorgeous colour or intricate music, almost satirical in a sense.

But he seldom developed this vein, and chiefly wrote in one of mystical Romanticism, melancholy in tone, but suffused with such sunset splendour of hue, and charged with such a burden of elfin music, as only the greatest things of Coleridge and Shelley, and perhaps Keats, had shown before. "The Blessed Damozel" sets the key-note of tone and colour, and it is maintained throughout to the "beryl-songs" of *Rose Mary* and the last revised sonnets of "The House of Life." The colour was richer, though the drawing was less exact, than Tennyson's; the music, less perfect and less varied, had even more of half-articulate charm; and the younger poet was prodigal of those appeals to passion and to mystery of which the elder's more Northern nature had been, though far indeed from incapable, yet somewhat chary, and more than somewhat shy. That the charm of Rossetti is a *morbidezza*, a beauty touching on and partly caused by disease, is perhaps indisputable; but it is still more indisputably beauty. The dreamy magnificence of "The Blessed Damozel," the soaring beat of "Love-Lily," the concentrated despair of "The Woodspurge," the reality, as of a picture actually hanging on the wall, in "The Wine of Circe," the etherealised description of the dead Rose Mary, and scores of other things, stand, and probably ever will stand,

as the furthest achievements of poetry in a certain direction. Only in a certain direction, of course, and leaving endless new paths open to the poet; but final in that.

The greatness of Miss Christina Rossetti's genius is best shown by the fact that while she naturally displayed a temper akin to her brother's, and for some time undoubtedly wrote to some extent under his inspiration, large parts, and some of the best parts, of her poetical accomplishment are quite distinct from anything of his. Nor is this distinction to be in the least sufficiently or reasonably accounted for by her sex, her piety, or any other conventional and obvious explanation. At points, of course, the brother and sister touch—they even overlap. The sonnet exercised its strong restraint, in the same Italian form, and with the same characteristics of colour, music, and meditation, on both: her sonnet-sequences are, with allowance for their different subjects, by no means unlike his. But her lyrics have a lighter, more bird-like, movement and voice than his stately descants; she is less prone to an extreme regularity of metre, and her whole tone is often different. She began, as far as publication goes, with *Goblin Market and other Poems* in 1861, followed it with another volume, *The Prince's Progress*, in 1866, and after a much longer interval with *A Pageant and other Poems* in 1881. Later, her verse was collected more than once, and it was supplemented by a posthumous volume after her death. But a good deal of it remains in two books of devotion (partly in prose, of which she was an exquisite mistress, partly in verse), entitled *Time Flies* (1885), and *The Face of the Deep* (1892), which she issued in her later years.

The poem in which, by order of publication and title, she announced herself, *Goblin Market*, though very pretty and almost beautiful, has too much of the deliberate and almost trivial fantasticality which Pre-Raphaelitism at first borrowed from the earlier Romantic schools. But other things in the same volume, such as "Dreamland," "Winter Rain," "When I am dead, my dearest," "The Three Enemies," and above all, "Sleep at Sea," are quite free from this objection, and gave an astonishingly true and new note of poetry, which was sustained, and indeed deepened, varied, and sweetened, till the beautiful lines "Heaven overarches sea and land," which are understood to be her last work, or at any rate composed within a very short time of her death. Her range was distinctly wide. She had, unlike Mrs. Browning, and perhaps unlike the majority of her sex, a very distinct sense of humour; she could sing, for music and in simple scheme, quite exquisitely; her pathos has never been surpassed, except in the great single strokes of Shakespeare and a very few other Elizabethans. But her most characteristic strain is where this pathos blends with, or passes into, the utterance

of religious awe, unstained and unweakened by any craven fear. The great devotional poets of the seventeenth century, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert, are more artificial than she is in their expression of this; and hardly even their art, certainly not the art of the last-named, strikes out rarer poetic flashes and echoes than those that we find from "Sleep at Sea" to "Birds of Paradise."[1]

William Morris.

In bulk of work, however, and in popular (which does not mean vulgar) charm no writer of the school who falls within our limits of discussion can approach Mr. William Morris. He was born in 1834, the son of a wealthy merchant, and was educated at Marlborough and Exeter College, Oxford. He did not take up any profession, though later he founded a famous shop or school of decorative art, which directly or indirectly helped to revolutionise the interior of English houses. It was in 1858 that the once neglected, but now famous, *Defence of Guenevere and other Poems* appeared, a book almost as much the herald of the second school of Victorian poetry as Tennyson's early work was of the first. Nor did he, perhaps, ever surpass it in poetic note, though he improved very much upon it in some ways. As in Christina Rossetti's first book a little later, the quaintness was a little aggressive, and, unlike hers, the mediævalism was more aggressive and exclusive still. But the charm both of picture and music was astonishing, and after forty years "The Blue Closet," "The Wind," and other pieces remain alone, in a poetic country neighbouring and friendly to the domain of the Rossettis, but independent of it—a country lit with lunar rainbows and ringing with fairy song. He had previously written both prose and verse in the above-mentioned *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. Eight years later, in 1866, Mr. Morris addressed a larger public (for the *Defence* and its companions could perhaps never be enjoyed by any such) with a long poem, *The Life and Death of Jason*. The subject was sufficiently familiar, the tone, though still archaic, made less extensive demands on natural or acquired sympathy, and the piece was couched in rhymed heroics of a new-old pattern, very much enjambed or overlapped, which carries the reader along with a singular combination of smoothness and freedom from monotony, and which, being quite different from most of the metrical media recently in vogue, had the attraction of freshness. It secured at once a wider audience than any long narrative poem had had for many years, and in its turn prepared the public for the poet's next, and most ambitious, performance, which, all things considered, must, perhaps, be allowed to be his masterpiece. This was *The Earthly Paradise*, which appeared in four volumes, the first two published

[1] An early poem, but not printed till after her death.

together, between 1868 and 1870. This great book consists of four-and-twenty narratives, twelve of Classical, twelve of Romantic origin, allotted in pairs to the twelve months, introduced by a singularly spirited narrative of adventure, and set in a frame of equal beauty. The metres varied, and the poet showed himself an equal master of the couplet just described, of the octosyllable, and of stanza-forms; nor, perhaps, have any verse-tales since the very beginning of the century equalled in combined merit such pieces as "The Lovers of Gudrun," the version of the Perseus story, "The Ring given to Venus," and, indeed, the majority of the sections. *Love is Enough* (1873) was less interesting in subject, and, with charming passages, made metrical experiments not too happy; while the poet's later versions of the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey* dissatisfied merely classical scholars without greatly pleasing those who can taste romance. But in 1877 he showed that his muse was not exhausted by a magnificent version of the legend of *Sigurd the Volsung*, clothed in a swinging anapæstic metre on which he had stamped his own individuality, and admirably suited to the subject.

But, though even this by no means closed his issue of verse (for he afterwards published *Poems by the Way* (1891) and other volumes), the later years of his life were in preference given up to prose romance. He had early practised prose translation, rendering after his fashion, in company with a Northern scholar, the *Story of Grettir the Strong* (1869), *The Volsunga Saga* (1870), and other Icelandic work. And his own earliest published work in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* had been a romance, *The Hollow Land*, with others which he never reprinted. But in his last decade (he died in October 1896) he began a series of similar things—*The House of the Wolfings* (1889), *The Roots of the Mountains* (1890), *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1891), *The Wood beyond the World* (1894), *The Well at the World's End* (1896), *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1897), *The Sundering Flood* (1898),[1] in which the vague romantic charm of his earlier verse was revived with wonderful effect. In all his prose work he used a dialect which may be described as English prose of the fifteenth century, strongly dashed with Scandinavianisms—a dialect which, like Spenser's, offended pedants and purists as "no language," but which was exactly suited for his purpose. On the whole, there is perhaps no poet of the century, since Scott, who has given such a volume of Romantic pleasure to his readers as Mr. Morris, while there is also none who at his own best is his superior in individuality and poignancy of charm. But his range was not over-wide, and the very bulk of his

[1] Besides *Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair* (1895), a charming variation on the theme of *Havelok*, printed at his private Kelmscott Press.

production prevented it from being always concentrated, or, to use an old but excellent phrase, "in beauty."

O'Shaughnessy.

The life of Arthur Edward O'Shaughnessy (1844-81) was short, and his period of poetical production was still shorter. In four years he published three volumes of most remarkable verse—*The Epic of Women* (1870), *Lays of France* (1872), and *Music and Moonlight* (1874). But he did not follow them up; his professional work lay in the Natural History Department of the British Museum, and the posthumous *Songs of a Worker* contained little of his very best, much of it being translation and paraphrase, as the *Lays of France*, an adaptation of those of Marie, had been earlier. The tale of "Colibri," his only attempt at a poem of length, is too much tinged with the personal sorrow which beset his last years, and partakes too much of the unsubstantial remoteness of Shelley's *Alastor*, to be quite a success; and these same characteristics, together with importunate obtrusion of creeds or disbeliefs of various kinds, mar the posthumous volume, which, however, contains some exquisite sonnets, and one or two lyrics, "Love, on your grave in the ground," "When the Rose came, I loved the Rose," and others, in his best style. But this style is chiefly found in *The Epic of Women* and *Music and Moonlight*, and here O'Shaughnessy has a quality which is almost all his own, though he owes a very little in form to Poe, a little more in thought and feeling to the French poet Baudelaire, and perhaps a little also to George Darley. For strange and sweet music, "Exile," "A Neglected Heart," "Barcarolle," "The Fountain of Tears," the "ode" of *Music and Moonlight*, "Once in a hundred years," "Has summer come without the rose?" and others stand quite by themselves. The late Mr. Palgrave, who discovered O'Shaughnessy in time to insert some of his work in the second series of the *Golden Treasury*, justly applied to them Sir Henry Wotton's famous phrase of *ipsa mollities;* but they have more than mere softness, they have mystery and magic. It is possible that this anthology may at last extend the enjoyment of them beyond the few who have from the first tasted their charm.

A not much longer life, even greater unhappiness (in this case it is to be feared by his own fault), and far more unfavourable external circumstances, were the lot of James Thomson the Second, who was born, the son of a sailor, at Port-Glasgow in 1834, and died in London after breaking a blood-vessel in 1882. He was educated at the Caledonian Asylum, and became an army schoolmaster; but was dismissed for insubordinate conduct, and after a wandering life for some time, turned journalist, and was this—as far as he had any regular occupation—till his death. Thomson's prose work which has been recovered is not inconsiderable, and displays undoubted ability

of the critical kind, marred not merely by crude and violent views, and a sour rusticity of temper, but by the kind of half-knowledge, and the conventional priggishness, which are apt to beset self-educated men. His verse is very unequal, but at its best fully earns him a place here. Its capital expression in bulk is the almost famous *City of Dreadful Night*, which first appeared in a freethought newspaper, the *National Reformer*, in 1874. Just before his death this was published as the title-piece of a volume, and another, *Vane's Story*, followed, with posthumous pieces, later. He is in much need of selection, which would display his narrow and somewhat sinister, but intense, poetical quality, at present too much lost and diluted in a mass of inferior work.

Others.

Although, among dead verse-writers who published about or after 1850, there are not a few of interest, perhaps hardly one can pretend to a substantive place here. Coventry Patmore (1823-96), after being long chiefly known by *The Angel in the House* (1854 onwards), a domestic love-history of great beauty in parts, but too fluent, and sometimes a little bathetic, gave stronger notes in the last twenty years of his life with *The Unknown Eros* (1877) and other things. Sir Francis Hastings Doyle (1810-88), Professor of Poetry at Oxford, with no very great range of poetical power, showed himself, when touching the "heroic lyre" in "The Red Thread of Honour," "The Private of the Buffs," and other pieces, the equal of Drayton and Campbell in their small and worthy class. Lord De Tabley (1835-95; better known, if known at all, in his earlier years as Mr. Leicester Warren, and writing under the name of W. P. Lancaster) came, like Patmore, to his own only in his last years with two volumes of *Dramatic and Lyrical Poems* (1893-95), but had in much earlier work shown poetic power far above the average. Those others in whose case entire omission might seem most unjust are perhaps Ebenezer Jones (1820-60), whose *Studies of Sensation and Event* (1843) even antedated the Spasmodic school generally, but is an outlier of it; William Johnson or Cory, whose *Ionica* has originality and classical charm; Charles Stuart Calverley, whose parodies and whimsicalities generally are among the most amusing of the century, and possess that touch of scholarship which is more especially needed to save verse of this kind from vulgarity and to give it permanence; and Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-98), a learned mathematician, but the property of literature in virtue of his delightful verse and prose medleys, all published as "by Lewis Carroll"—*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1866), *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876), etc. The rest must be silence.

CHAPTER V

MISCELLANEOUS

J. S. Mill—Mansel—John Austin—Others—Newman—Borrow—Others—Science—Darwin—The *Vestiges*—Hugh Miller—Huxley

THE extension of literary treatment to subjects which had previously received little or nothing of it, on the one hand, and the contraction of literary effort in some where once it was busy and almost supreme, on the other, have been noted as characteristic of modern English writing. And both result, in the case of such a historical account as this, in the necessity of a sort of "pool" for the reception of handlings of new or old subjects which have scarcely attained, or have gradually lost, the proportions requiring separate treatment here. Philosophy and theology belong to the last category of inclusion, scholarship and physical science to the first, while the once all-important name of drama must have been included, if it had not seemed better to give it no grouped treatment, and simply to mention the rather rare examples of it which have literary interest with the other work of their writers.

In philosophical writing of the wide and "applied" kind there have been five writers who dominate the second third of the century, while two of them lived nearly to its close—the younger Mill, his opponent Dean Mansel, Austin, Maine, and Stephen.

John Stuart Mill, the son of James, was born in London on 12th May 1806, educated according to his father's unnatural fads, and early introduced by him into the East India House. But official duties were to him merely a profitable avocation: his vocation was entirely philosophic and literary. He was for some time editor of the *London and Westminster Review*, and his purely literary work in essay is not despicable; but logic, ethics, and political discussion in the philosophical succession of Locke and Hume, with a strong dash of French positivism, were what attracted him most. In 1843 he published his celebrated *System of Logic, Ratiocinative* (the substitution for Deductive is important) *and*

J. S. Mill.

Inductive; in 1848 his scarcely less celebrated *Political Economy*—a new outlier of philosophy which, from the time of its English father Adam Smith downwards, has contributed much more than a respectable share of English philosophy which is literature. He entered Parliament in 1865, and was a conspicuous though amiable failure there, was turned out in 1868, and died five years later at Avignon. He had always lived much in France, where he was partly educated, and there was a certain French strain, as well as a feminine one, in his style and thought. His minor works, some of them not so very minor, were *Liberty* (1859), *Dissertations and Discussions* (1859-75), *Utilitarianism* (1863), a book on *Comte* (1865), an elaborate *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* (1865; much of this was an excited polemic against the religious philosophy of Hamilton's disciple Mansel), *The Subjection of Women* (1869), and posthumously, an interesting *Autobiography* (1873-74). With Mill's philosophical peculiarities we are hardly here concerned, more than to say that he was a rigid sensationalist in psychology, and in political economy and politics proper a believer in "Liberty," almost to the full anarchic impossibilities of Godwin, a Utilitarian in ethics, and an "Associationist" everywhere. His literary exposition of these tenets deserves all but the highest praise, and with a more inspiring creed would probably have merited the highest, being clear without shallowness, popular without vulgarity, and precise without any indulgence of that extravagantly technical jargon which has put so much recent philosophy out of court with literary judgment.

Mansel.

The opponent just mentioned, Henry Longueville Mansel (1820-71), a much younger man than Mill, died before him, and wrote very much less, while his subjects were, almost exclusively, not the exoteric and popular, but the esoteric and technical departments of philosophy. Yet he was as little of a "jargonist" as Mill himself, a far closer and deeper thinker, and the master of a style which, in his few excursions to the matter of the general reader, became literary in the finest sense, while even in his more abstract writings it has the most admirable quality. He received his education at Merchant Taylors' School and St. John's College at Oxford, became a Fellow of this latter, Bampton Lecturer, and first Waynflete Professor of Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy in the University. He was long the leader of the Tory party in Oxford, and was made Dean of St. Paul's in 1868, but held the post only a short time, dying suddenly in 1871. His book-work is not large: a volume of *Bampton Lectures* (1858), which were violently attacked by freethinkers and others for their so-called Occamism (or Occamism turned upside down) on the relations of the Deity to the

moral standard, but which stand almost alone as examples of really philosophical theology in our time; a dissertation on *Metaphysics* (1860); and *Prolegomena Logica* (1851), his chief original contribution to philosophy; besides some not individually bulky *Lectures*, *Letters*, etc. It is said that he cannot be found in German dictionaries of philosophy, which would seem to be so much the worse for those repositories of learning. After his death a volume, interesting but very partially representative of his powers, was published, containing a reprint of an extraordinarily brilliant University "skit" in verse called *Phrontisterion*, and some *Quarterly* essays; with another volume on *The Gnostic Heresies* (1875). As a man of letters he may be more than content with the exact and generous encomium of Mr. Pater (a critic as competent in the particular matter as alien from the Dean in general tone of thought and choice of subjects) that Mansel's works "illustrate the literary beauty that there may be in closeness, and with obvious repression or economy of a fine rhetorical gift." And it is scarcely necessary to say that such rhetorical gift (which has not been scanty) as has existed in our century has too often *not* been repressed or economised.

John Austin.

Austin, Maine, and Stephen earned their chief reputation by devoting themselves to the philosophic handling of law—a subject which Bentham has at least the credit of rescuing from the mere "text-and-margent" dealing of too many early English writers on it. Austin (1790-1859) was a man old enough to have appeared in the previous Book, and his great work, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined*, appeared as early as 1831. But his lectures were not published till after his death. More philosophical and more literary than Bentham, Austin had a harder and stronger intellect than Mill's, and is perhaps, on the whole, the greatest product of Utilitarianism. His clearness is partly the result of—is certainly accompanied by—limitations; and like all his school he has a not quite intelligent intolerance of the inexplicable. But he was a great mental gymnast and gymnasiarch, and his style agrees with his gifts.

Others.

Maine and Stephen, a younger pair, belong distinctly to the later half of the century. Both depended very much, though by no means in matter of direct pupilage, on Austin, and both exhibit philosophy as it busies itself chiefly with politics or the political sciences. Henry James Sumner Maine, born in 1822, was educated at Christ's Hospital and at Pembroke College, Cambridge, whence he passed to Trinity Hall, of which he became at first Fellow and afterwards Master from 1877 till his death in 1888. He was made Professor of Civil Law at five-and-twenty, and soon after Reader at Lincoln's Inn; in 1862 he became Legal Member

of Council in India. He returned to a place in the Indian Council at home, and to the Professorship of Jurisprudence at Oxford. He was a rather copious contributor to the newspaper press, but his connection with literature depends mainly on four works of great importance and admirable style—*Ancient Law*, his masterpiece (1861), *Village Communities* (1871), *Early Law and Custom* (1883), and *Popular Government* (1885).

His successor on the Indian Council, Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, was seven years younger, and survived Maine rather less than the same term. He was son of another Sir James Stephen, a very considerable person of his day as an *Edinburgh* reviewer, an official in the Colonial Office, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, and author of divers books, the chief being *Essays in Ecclesiastical History*. The younger Sir James was called to the Bar in 1854, and died, shortly after resigning a judgeship, forty years later. He was at Eton for a time, then at King's College, London, and finished his education at Trinity College, Cambridge. His main subject was that of his profession, and his treatise on the *Criminal Law* is a standard book, but he wrote much in theology, in which his thought inclined to the negative ; history, Indian and other ; and miscellaneous literature. His best literary mark, both in thought and style, was perhaps made in *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity* (1873).

Theology itself has contributed even less than philosophy to the permanent literary production of the century, and most of what it has given of this kind is due to the Oxford Movement. This not merely produced the massive scholarship and striking, if rugged, style of its great and never lost leader Pusey (1806-82), the exquisite Christian verse of Keble (1792-1866), the admirable literary balance and precision of Dean Church (1815-90), but was responsible, as matter of reaction and revulsion, besides the already mentioned Froude, for the strange, unattractive, but intensely characteristic work of Mark Pattison (1813-89), Fellow and latterly Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, who inadequately represented his great learning in humanist and Renaissance literature by studies of *Casaubon* (1875) and Scaliger, wrote a great little book on *Milton* (1879), contributed to the once famous *Essays and Reviews* (1860), and left an autobiography showing with admirable literary finish, but with somewhat hideous veracity, the trials of a wounded soul, incapable of earthly medication and rejecting heavenly.

But the literary glory of the last two-thirds of the century in English theology was the other, the lost leader of the Tractarian movement, John Henry Newman, who is ranked by some with, and by most competent judges not far below, the greatest masters of English prose, and who had no small skill in verse, as is shown by

the *Dream of Gerontius* and many hymns and poems, of which the chief is the famous "Lead, Kindly Light." Newman was born in the year 1801, and in London, of an East-Anglian family. He was educated at a private school, and went to Trinity College, Oxford, early. He was not at first very successful, but obtained an Oriel Fellowship in 1823, whereby, at the age of five-and-twenty, he became vicar of St. Mary's, the University church, an appointment of no pecuniary value, but as a vantage-point the equal at least of any cure in England. For some twenty years Newman delivered from this pulpit sermons unlike anything else of their kind; and he also took all but, or altogether, the greatest part, certainly the greatest literary part, in the polemic of the Oxford Movement. His journey to the Mediterranean in 1832-33, and his resignation of St. Mary's shortly before he left the Church of England, were the most important events in his career, which lasted longer after this event than before it. He wrote much during his nearly fifty years of connection with the Roman Church, where he rose to be Cardinal, but, except the *Apologia* of 1864, in which he eagerly availed himself of Kingsley's awkward attack, not much of the first importance. He died 11th August 1890. Newman.

Newman's work is exceedingly voluminous, and hardly even the briefest analysis of it can be attempted here. The *Plain and Parochial Sermons* and the *Apologia* would suffice for an appreciation of his style, though nothing that he wrote in prose or verse can be called superfluous. In the main he is a representative of that perfected plain Georgian style which has been more than once indicated as the best, for all purposes, in English. It is in him refined still further by an extra dose of classical and academic correctness, flavoured with quaint though never over-mannered turns of phrase, and shot in every direction with a quintessential individuality, rarely attempting (though never failing when it does attempt) the purely rhetorical, but instinct with a strange quiver of religious and poetical spirit.

The theological school formally opposed to Tractarianism was not distinguished by literary merit; but it so happens that one of the most remarkable literary figures of the century, and one who, as in the strictest sense miscellaneous and nondescript, has the best right here, was violently anti-Tractarian, and indeed wrote one of his few books, and great part of another, almost wholly in that sense. This was George Borrow, a novelist, whose novels are, in fact, little or nothing more than very imaginative auto-biographies—which description might also be given to almost the whole of his work. Borrow, the son of an officer in the army, was born in Norfolk in 1803, and died in the same county in 1881. After some curious experiences in quest of literary work, he became Borrow.

an agent of the Bible Society, and travelled much in Spain in the exciting early days of the reign of Queen Isabel II. These travels supplied him with the materials of his two first books—*The Gipsies in Spain* (1840) and *The Bible in Spain* (1843), the latter one of the most brilliant and original books of travel ever written. In *Lavengro* (1851) and *The Romany Rye* (1857) he wove his earlier adventures in England itself, and especially his knowledge of gipsy life, with many other strands, of which the above-named anti-Puseyism was the chief, into a singular fabric, very delightful at its best to those who can taste it; while the later *Wild Wales* is again avowed travel. These are all his published original books; but he also wrote a vast mass of translation, philological work, etc., only a very small part of which ever got into print. Borrow was one of the most unreasonable of men, and the eccentricity of his genius no doubt had something of affectation in it. But it was genius at least as undoubted as that of any one mentioned in this chapter, and the flavour of his manner and style is as intense as it is unique.

Close to most of the names mentioned in this chapter, and in others of this Book, come yet other names which may seem to demand association with them:—Jowett by Pattison; Professors T. H. Green and Wallace among the philosophers; Seeley among the historians; Walter Bagehot (1826-77), a man of singular intelligence both in literature and politics; John Forster (1812-76)—a bumptious person, but a useful scholar—and Dr. John Brown (1810-82), the most Goldsmithian of recent writers, among the essayists; Richard Jefferies (1848-87), the greatest minute describer of English country life since White of Selborne, either by himself or with the "pictorials" like Ruskin and Pater. But we must pass them by, as less eminent and representative than others, and end with a few specialists in branches less literary as a rule.

Others.

The production of physical science, as might be expected, has been very large, but from the increase of technical and specialist character seldom literary. Yet it has enlisted some persons of real literary talent, and one or two of something not unlike genius. The most important of these beyond all question were Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley, to whom, as an example of popular science, we may add Hugh Miller.

Science.

Charles Robert Darwin, grandson of the author of the *Botanic Garden*, was born at Shrewsbury in 1809, and educated there, at Edinburgh, and at Christ's College, Cambridge. One of the chances which only come to men at once great and fortunate, but of which only men at once great and fortunate take full advantage, made him naturalist to H.M.S. *Beagle*, during her scientific cruise to the South Seas between 1831 and 1836, under

Darwin.

the command of Captain, afterwards Admiral, Fitzroy. On his return home, having considerable means and no need of a profession, he gave himself up entirely to experiment, thought, and literary exposition of his views in regard to biology, especially in regard to the famous theories of Selection and Evolution with which his name is connected. The *Origin of Species*, his most famous book, appeared in 1859, and was followed by others. On such views historical literary criticism has no opinions: it looks at their authors, from Heraclitus to Darwin, with an equal eye, knowing that they dawn, and charm, and irritate, and pall, and pass away, retaining little but historical interest in themselves, unless they happen to have sought and obtained the aid of literature itself in their expression. Darwin seems to have sought little, but he obtained something—an absolute clearness, a kind of competency and sufficiency for his own needs, which can never pass unnoticed, and with them an intimation of literary power in reserve, which could have been displayed if occasion had served.

A less scientific, but more definitely literary, anticipation of the Evolution theory, the *Vestiges of Creation*, which continued to be anonymous for some time, but was known to be the work of Robert Chambers, a well-known Edinburgh publisher, had appeared in 1844, and had been opposed by many, including an interesting self-made man of science and letters, Hugh Miller of Cromarty, who, born seven years before Darwin, began life as a stone-mason, became a journalist, and died by his own hand in 1856. His *Old Red Sandstone* (1841) unites scientific value with popular appeal and literary merit in a very unusual way, and almost as much may be said of the rest of his numerous writings (especially *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, 1852), where their matter admits of really literary treatment. There can be nothing more hopelessly unliterary than to undervalue Hugh Miller.

The *Vestiges*.

Hugh Miller.

But the greatest man of science from the point of view of literature during the century—a man who must have been remarkable in any literary prose exercise to which he had given himself, and of whose performances it can only be regretted that they too often had the two most ephemeral of subjects—physical science and anti-theological polemic—for their themes, was Thomas Henry Huxley, born at Ealing in 1825. He entered the navy as a doctor, and visited the South Seas, but he did not find the Admiralty sympathetic, and left the service, though he held many public appointments later. His strictly scientific work was of a more special character than Darwin's. But he used his considerable culture and his undoubted literary genius in a copious and rather too aggressive abundance of lectures, reviews, essays, biographies, mostly defending

Huxley.

science by assuming the offensive, but always curiously alive, full of inspiration from the very sources—pure philosophy, pure theology, pure literature—which he would have had men leave for others, and displaying a vivid and forcible style, only deficient in the one grace of urbanity. If the good points of Huxley and those of Matthew Arnold could have been combined, and their weak points eliminated, the best literary manner of the nineteenth century, and one of the best of all times, would have resulted.

Even shorter and more eclectic notice must suffice for the more noticeable names of the department between science and literature, that of philological study in ancient and modern languages, which does not disregard literature altogether. This combination has been too much forgotten, yet some names of those who have not forgotten it emerge. The revived interest in Old English literature as literature bore its fruit also in the study of English language, and of all the formal parts of English rhetoric and poetry. Some linguistic scholars have been noted above, as has the most important in the other class, the author of the one important book which exists on English Prosody, Dr. Edwin Guest.

In the classics themselves not a little good work has been done. The most accomplished scholar, in the strict technical modern sense, who did not let slip his grasp of literature, was probably H. A. J. Munro of Cambridge, who produced an epoch-making edition of Lucretius; the most literary exponents and professors of classical literature, who were also scholars, John Conington of Oxford and W. Y. Sellar of Edinburgh, the former famous for his edition of Virgil, the latter for his series of books on the *Roman Poets* of the Republic and the Early Empire. But the work of scholars in this kind must always be more ministerial than creative. They efface themselves in introducing others.

CONCLUSION

THE peculiarities of the period immediately noticed in the preceding Book resemble those of the earlier part of the century in defying single or simple characterisation. Owing partly to the wide expatiation of literature in respect of subject, partly to the increasing rejection of narrow or identical regulations as to form, the product is—at any rate when seen so close—a little chaotic; and it would be a proof rather of rashness than of prescience to undertake to say how the firm perspective of the past will represent it to the future.

Something, however, we can see and say. In poetry, that reliance on the combined appeal of poetic expression to eye and ear by extremely elaborate and vivid description and colouring, by cunningly adjusted symphony of letter and syllable, which in the first half disengaged itself from the turmoil of the Romantic revolt, has been more and more the special method of the second; and though the Pre-Raphaelite school, which expressed this most fully, is probably past its prime, no other has really taken its place, and no poet of anything like commanding originality has appeared for many years. New singers are more and more echoes—sometimes direct, sometimes blended. We have our Crashaw and our Akenside; we have even resurrections of voices so recent, and themselves so little perfected, as those of the Spasmodics. But there is no sign yet of a Tennyson or a Browning, even of a Morris or a Rossetti. Meanwhile, Tennyson himself has given to the century an example of a poet permitted by fortune to develop himself, using the permission as perhaps only two poets before him (Chaucer and Dryden) had done, and leaving a life-work which, if it come short of Chaucer in originality and freshness, of Dryden in strength, possesses its own superiorities over both. And Browning has left us a figure unique, interesting in its very faults, Wordsworthian in the difference between its best poetry and its worst, and at the opposite pole from Wordsworth's in its restless energy and all-attempting variations.

In the matter of prose, the still further development of the novel, and in the wide sense of the essay, has been the main feature; but

the form of prose, not a little affected by this very fact, has given us a somewhat more definite phenomenon—one fit to be classed with the greater phases of style during the history itself as a whole. The revolt from plainness which has been sketched in connection with the names of Landor in one direction, of De Quincey and Wilson in another, of Carlyle in a third, has never exactly subsided, even into a Provisional Constitution. But it has passed through at least two well-marked phases, corresponding to the second and last thirds of the century respectively. In the middle period, though prose of the very greatest was produced by Carlyle himself in the more revolutionary, by Newman in the more academic varieties, and by Froude in a style between them, the general tendency of writing was to a looseness and slipshodness, not indeed quite reaching the state of things which has been noticed at the end of the seventeenth century, but, in the different circumstances, not wholly dissimilar. Then, between 1860 and 1870, but not much before the later date, there set in a reaction, not towards a plain style, but towards a sort of New Euphuism, very punctilious of detail, elaborately yellow-stockinged and cross-gartered, tremblingly alive to the least shadow of the obvious, irrevocably determined that none of its guests should take down to the banquet of words a partner in whose company it had ever found itself before. Sparely practised at first, this manner became common about the end of the eighties, and since the death of two of the chief practitioners, Mr. Pater and Mr. Stevenson (who raised it from a mannerism into a style), it has been held rather disgraceful not to follow it. Meanwhile it is quite the most distinct literary feature of the last quarter of the century, and one of the few such features which the century itself presents, comparable to those of the centuries before it.

As we survey these centuries at the end of the strange Herculean task of sketching the literature of a thousand years in less than as many pages, we need attempt no Pisgah-sight forward. But the route behind us is, it may be hoped, fairly clear. All those who possess or claim the right to be guides in the journey will not agree with this particular road-book; there must be differences on small points, and there may be differences, not unwarranted, even on some great ones. But, as it has been less the object to air crotchets than to write with what has been called a "reasoned orthodoxy," or with heresies repressed except where honour and conscience require protest, such differences may perhaps be made matter of agreement, of compromise, at least of suspended discussion. Those who—and this is the main purpose of the volume—use it to supply the necessary minutiæ of useful information in guiding them-

selves or others through the history of which it is a mere epitome, may often find the opinions here expressed differing from other things that have been written about the books; but they will, it is hoped, less often find difference with the books themselves. It is these books, and not the theories about them or the gossip about their authors, to which I have striven here to serve as usher, to make access to them a little easier, comprehension of them in the initial stages a little less arduous. To "do justice," in the common phrase, to such a theme is impossible; the biggest book in the language, and the greatest genius among its writers, could hardly do that to English Literature. But even by as much as this is impossible, by so much is it the more to be wished that every one should be helped and encouraged to acquaint himself in his measure with the subject —to gain some knowledge, as far as concerns his own nation and language, of the grace and the glory of the written word that conquers Time.

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⁂ *In order not unduly to swell this index, entries are confined to those passages which contain substantive reference to, and not mere citation of, the persons, books, or matters indicated. The dates here have been adjusted to those in* The Dictionary of National Biography, *with probably some accidental exceptions. Variation in the text is* not *accidental, but kept to show that authorities disagree. When it extends to one year only, the difference between new and old style, as to the beginning of the year, will often account for it.*

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